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ABSTRACT

This issue contains five articles, including reports of activities of the University of Hong Kong's English Center, five action research reports, reflections on various conferences, and a book review by Ray Mackay of "Asian Voices in English." The five articles are: "Cultural Syntonicity: Co-operative Relationships between the ESP Unit and Other Departments" (Colin Barron); "From 'Remedial English' to 'English Enhancement' (So, What Else Is New?)" (Desmond Allison); "Self-Access for Self-Directed Learning" (Philip Benson); "Assessing Students at Tertiary Level: How Can We Improve?" (Jo A. Lewkowicz); and "Ensuring Access and Quality in Open Learning Programmes: Communication and Study Skills Training for ESL-Medium Higher Education" (Nigel J. Bruce). Reports of research are: "An Introduction to the Action Research Progress Reports" (Denis Williamson and Elaine Martyn); "Self-Access Action Research: A Progress Report" (Elaine Martyn and Chan Nim Yin); "A Progress Report of an Action Research Project into the Marking of Students' Written Work" (Denis Williamson); "Electronic Mail as a Tool To Enable Purposeful Communication" (David Gardner)' and "Discourse Awareness in Student Writing" (Desmond Allison). (LB)

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Policy

Hong Kong Papers in Linguistics and Language Teaching encourages submission of previously unpublished manuscripts in a number of areas, both theoretical and practical, including: general linguistics, language teaching methodology, evaluation of teaching materials, language curriculum development, language testing, educational technology, language and language teaching surveys, language planning, and bilingual education.

Submission Categories

The editors welcome contributions of three broad types: articles, reports of projects or work in progress, and book reviews.

* Full length articles should total not more than 20 A4 pages. They should include an abstract of not more than 200 words and biographical data in not more than 50 words.
* Reports should total not more than 5 pages, and may cover any aspect of language related research, development, and professional activities.
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Guidelines for Authors

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* Articles submitted to the Hong Kong Papers should not have been previously published, nor should they be under consideration for publication elsewhere.
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FROM THE EDITORS

This edition of The Hong Kong Papers in Linguistics and Language Teaching comes to you with certain changes in format, and embodying certain new ideas. One of these is the text that you are now reading: like planned self-access material, we hope these two pages may suggest pathways which will enhance your intake, our output, and our collective enjoyment.

We wished to encourage a greater variety of types of submission; apart from full length articles we include a number of shorter, and not so short, reports aimed at recording the activities and concerns of the Centre during the past twelve months. This issue also features personal reflections on some conferences attended and a review of a book published recently by colleagues from the Faculty of Arts. Happy reading!

IN THIS ISSUE:

ARTICLES

Colin Barron examines the dimensions of cooperative relationships between subject- and language-specialists in ESP. He notes that this type of teaching seeks to link language learning to academic development and the initiation of students into the 'culture' of the target discipline, stressing that close cooperation between subject and language teachers is vital.

Desmond Allison details arguments against the term "remedial" when applied to language-across-the-curriculum programmes such as those conducted at HKU; he suggests instead, that a term like "enhancement" can reflect a reality in which improved linguistic skills make a vital contribution to integrating students into an academic community. He develops the theme by illustrating how programmes of language enhancement could be realised and developed in the HKU context.

Phil Benson discusses the development and organisation of self-access learning resources at HKU. He considers the view that one function of a self-access system is to support and promote self-directed learning and concludes that sensitivity to the ways in which learners develop self-directed learning skills can help to determine the most effective ways of organising the resources available.

Jo Lewkowicz reflects on the rightful place of assessment and testing in the Centre's work, she highlights ways in which well planned assessment can inform and motivate all 'players' in the learning process, voicing particular concern that it should be fully integrated into courses and their development.

Nigel Bruce addresses the problem of adult students choosing to pursue academic qualifications in a second language through the open learning programmes run by the School for Professional and Continuing Education (SPACE) at HKU. He describes the kind of problems these students face and recommends a policy of training learners in communication and study skills as a means of ensuring access to full degree programmes while maintaining the quality of the education on offer.

REPORTS

Notable in the past year has been the establishment of credit-bearing English courses for the Social Sciences, integration of self-access learning into our biggest courses, and an increased interest in action research. The following contributions reflect some of these developments.

Denis Williamson and **Elaine Martyn** introduce Action Research, indicating ways in which it can contribute to the work of the Centre.

Elaine Martyn and **Chan Nim Yin** report on their group's investigation into teacher and learner attitudes to self-access. After reviewing some of the literature, the writers describe individual plans of action drawn up by members of the group and highlight the recommendations made. They conclude by anticipating a further cycle of action plans.

The increasing variety of Project work used in the Centre's credit-bearing courses has prompted an interest in the nature of assessment criteria applied to the final written product. **Denis Williamson** reports on the findings of an Action Research group who set out to explore their own assumptions when marking student work. He concludes by identifying related areas for further investigation.

David Gardner details how an invitation by a university in New York (CUNY) for student informants has provided a small group of his Computer Science students with the welcome opportunity to enhance their E-mail skills, while practising their English by acting as informants from another culture.

Reporting on a group project spanning some two years, **Desmond Allison** summarises a series of interlocking investigations into teacher and learner perceptions of problems in students' academic writing. He draws certain implications for effective teaching and includes an illustration of text reformulation.

CONFERENCE REPORTS

Colleagues were invited to write to us with brief impressionistic reviews of conferences they had attended. **Jo Lewkowicz** went to JALT held in Kobe, Japan, in November, 1991; **Liz Nakhoul** attended a Symposium at the ELTU, Qatar University in December; **Val Pickard** went to Hong Kong's ILE Conference in the same month, while **Nigel Bruce** attended TESOL in Vancouver, followed by AAAL (American Association of Applied Linguistics) in Seattle in spring of this year.

BOOK REVIEW

Ray Mackay has sent us a review of Asian Voices in English (published by HKU Press, 1991); this volume, edited by Mimi Chan and Roy Harris, records the proceedings of a Symposium held at HKU in spring, 1990. While noting differing quality in the writing of this diverse group of scholars, he finds illuminating discussion of the challenges facing those who write in a second language, as well as enjoyment of some of the literature on offer.

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Cultural Syntonicity: Co-operative Relationships Between The ESP Unit And Other Departments[1]

Colin Barron

Many examples of co-operative projects between ESP units and subject departments have been reported in the ESP literature since Selinker's seminal paper appeared in 1979. Most are case studies of specific ESP programmes. Explanations of the methodologies have not been prominent. This paper is an overview of the different ways in which co-operative methods have been used in ESP programmes. It begins with the history of co-operative teaching methods which indicates that the methods were first used over 100 years ago in engineering. Co-operative methods are categorised into four types according to the level of involvement of the subject specialist in the ESP programme. The advantages and disadvantages of the methods are discussed, concluding that the advantages considerably outweigh the disadvantages. It is suggested that the purposes of the methods are to achieve cultural syntonicity (i.e. coherence) with the content subjects, since academic development and language development go hand in hand. Finally, the paper concludes by suggesting that ESP can learn from the experience of engineering in exploiting the advantages it gained from co-operative teaching methods to improve its status.

Introduction

"How can we teach the NNS [non-native speaker] to read this stuff when we don't even know what we don't even know!" (Selinker 1979, p.201).

This plaintive cry by one of Selinker's co-researchers is an acknowledgement that ESP teachers need help in understanding the rhetorical, organisational and processual conventions of the subjects they service. This kind of information can be obtained from subject specialists by using ethnographic tools available to us, such as structured interviews, observation and analysis. A more integrative approach is to engage the subject specialist in co-operative teaching methods, such as collaborative teaching and team teaching. All these methods - subject-specialist informants, collaborative teaching and team teaching - are the subject of this paper.

Co-operative teaching methods, including team teaching, appear not to have been major methodological movements in EFL/ESL before the advent of ESP, although they were used in teaching English to native speakers in British and American schools (Adams 1970; Grannis 1964). I can find no mention of them, for example, in Howatt's history of English language teaching (1984). Since Selinker's pioneering study in 1979, various co-operative projects in ESP have been reported in different parts of the world. These are summarised in figure 1 below.

Most of the reported examples of co-operation between the ESP unit and other departments are case studies of ESP programmes. Detailed explications of the methodology are not common, and as far as I know there is no overview of the field in ESP. Doubts have been raised as to the relative efficiency of using subject specialists (e.g. Swales 1990, p.129). I wish to share my extensive experience of using co-operative methods at the PNG University of Technology which illustrate some of the considerable advantages that can be gained as a result of the interdisciplinary relationships that are created by these methods.

Colin Barron arrived at the University of Hong Kong in December 1991 after spending eight years at the PNG University of Technology in Lae where he developed collaborative teaching projects in all of the courses that he taught. His interest in cross-cultural studies started when he was a student of Arabic and Persian at Edinburgh University and has continued and been enhanced by living and working in Iran, Jordan and Nepal, as well as PNG.

In this paper I first discuss how co-operative teaching methods have an established educational pedigree, stretching back more than 100 years in other subjects. Then I describe the different ways that co-operation can take place between the ESP unit and other departments, discuss the purposes of each one, and their advantages and disadvantages, and introduce the notion of cultural syntonicity (i.e. the aims and activities of the ESP programme are coherent with the students' subjects of study (Papert 1980, p.68) as the main purpose of these methods. Finally, conclusions are drawn on how ESP can exploit co-operative methods to improve its status.

History of Co-operative Teaching Methods

The earliest instance of co-operative teaching I can find dates back to 1888 when a professor of civil engineering at Ohio State University sought help from his surveying colleagues to teach surveying skills to his engineering students (Sherman & Schlafly 1920). Initial experiments in co-operative teaching thereafter appear to have taken place in universities (Stevenson 1921, p.158-168), specifically involving engineering departments and other departments, for example mathematics (Root 1916) and surveying (Sherman & Schlafly 1920).

The most intense form of co-operative teaching, team teaching, has been recognised as a useful method for about 30 years in schools on both sides of the Atlantic, since 1954 in American schools (Shaplin 1964a, p.1), and since the 1960s in British schools (Adams 1970; Freeman 1969; Warwick 1971).

In ESP, the parameters were defined early on in its history (paralleling engineering's experience at a similar stage in its development) by Selinker (1979). He posited several key research questions and suggested a methodology, using as an example a subject-specialist informant (SSI) in genetics. The model was further refined in a later paper (Bley-Vroman & Selinker 1984). Selinker's notion of subject-specialist informant (SSI) has since been extended to include subject specialists working with ESP teachers at more integrative levels than he initially described, including close co-operation at all stages of the ESP programme, i.e. collaborative teaching and team teaching.

Co-operative Methods

I agree with Stephenson when she says, "By its nature every instance of ESP must be unique" (nd: p.1). But this statement refers to course design and materials. It does not necessarily apply to methodologies. The history of co-operative methodologies shows that they are not unique to ESP. We can learn from others' experiences with co-operative teaching methods to enhance student learning by creating cultural syntonicity (Papert 1980, p.68), to forge interdisciplinary relationships, and to bring benefits which raise the profile of the ESP unit vis-a-vis the departments it services.

Four methods of working with colleagues in other departments are outlined in this section. Each successive method subsumes the modus operandi inherent in the previous ones, but each can be used separately. Individual teachers can decide which method best suits them and their situation.

The subject-specialist informant (SSI)

Subject-specialist informants provide the naive ESP teacher with insights on the content and organisation of texts and on the processes of their subject. Selinker (1979) was the first to describe this method in an article which showed how structured questioning can elicit the rhetorical functions of a text from the informant, in this case a research article in genetics.

The method has since been used at all stages in ESP. It has been used to determine the use of specific language points in one genre of a particular subject, e.g the use of the passive in astrophysics research articles (Tarone, Dwyer, Gillette & Icke 1982), or alternants in surgical reports (Pettinari 1983). It has been used to determine the schema of chapters in introductory textbooks in geology (Love 1991), and in analysing examinations; "what the subject-teacher intends by the questions he sets; what sort of

structuring is expected in the answers; and what sort of performance is accepted as adequate" (Johns & Dudley-Evans 1980, p.9). It has also been used to specify needs prior to course design (Ramani, Chacko, Singh & Glendinning 1988). In an interesting variation, Zumrawi (1984) used the method with a non-native speaker of English to determine his teaching methodology, hypothesising that:

> The SEI [specialised educational informant] at the Polytechnic makes significant amendments in his teaching content and methodology so that students can cope with their learning load. (Zumrawi 1984, p.9)

A specialised educational informant (SEI) was consulted to find out what actually happened in the classroom rather than what the syllabus laid down because

> It was felt that such information could be of significant use in helping us to narrow the gap between what we provide in terms of syllabuses and materials and the students' *real* needs. (Zumrawi 1984, p.8; emphasis in original).

A process-oriented approach was considered to be more useful than a target-oriented approach because the primary purpose of ESP courses is to produce students who are good students of engineering through the medium of English, rather than merely good at English. "The students arrive with some knowledge of grammatical rules but little communicative competence, and few are actually capable of following their studies without help" (Zumrawi 1984, p.11).

In general, co-operative methods involving the processes of the content subject are rare. Two examples, using students as informants, are Jacobson (1986) and Schmidt (1981). Both investigated how students go about acquiring the knowledge of their subject, in the physics laboratory and in the lecture room respectively, as part of their needs analyses.

The SSI method involves making use of ethnographic tools to gather the data. These are typically structured and unstructured interviews, observation, field notes, and recordings.

The purpose of this method is to enable naive ESP teachers to become informed about unfamiliar artefacts, such as technical texts, and processes in a subject that is completely alien to them. As noted above, the majority of research has concentrated on products, but processes can be investigated as well. The data elicited can be used in the classroom to teach the students how and why information is structured in their subject of study.

The Consultative Method

The consultative method involves bringing in the subject specialist as a consultant at specific stages in a course or project to provide his/her expertise on specific content. The consultant may be brought in at any stage. At the design stage he/she may suggest topics for projects. During the course he/she may give tutorials (Gee et al. 1984, p.121) or lectures (Barron 1992, forthcoming), hold discussions (Adams-Smith 1980), provide assistance in writing (Johns & Dudley-Evans 1980, p.8-9), or help to assess the students' performance on a project. At the Papua New Guinea (PNG) University of Technology we used consultants to advise students on how to work through the calculations for a project, mark them, assist at the testing stage of a project so that the students were aware of the scientific concepts underlying what they are doing, judge models (Barron 1991, 1992), and mark the product (assignments, reports). In all of these examples, the consultant visited the students. The students can also visit the consultant (Adams-Smith 1980).

The purpose of this method is to provide specialist input at key stages in the course so that the English course maintains content correctness, because, unlike the collaborative method which follows, in ESP programmes that use the consultative method the content is often determined by the ESP course designers. The ESP teacher can concentrate on how the students communicate rather than what they communicate. It is often used in situations in which the English course is supplementary to the students' subjects of study, e.g. in situations where English is compulsory. One of the aims of the ESP programme

may be to convince the students that the English they are studying is complementary to their subject of study.

Collaborative Teaching

Collaborative teaching has been generally taken as a form of team-teaching (e.g. Nolasco 1981), but I prefer to regard it as a distinct category because it occurs at a less integrative point on the continuum (see fig. 2). Often the reasons for choosing to be collaborative rather than interventionist (i.e. team teaching) are pragmatic, e.g. timetabling constraints or economic constraints, but there may be other reasons, for example sharp differences in the pedagogic methods of the teachers.

The collaborative method is the one in which the ESP teacher and the subject specialist collaborate on all aspects of the course - needs analysis, design, teaching and assessment - but do not actually share the classroom. A key feature of collaborative programmes is that the content is determined by the subject department, not the ESP unit. The ESP teacher teaches the language and communication skills, and the subject teacher teaches the concepts and other skills needed. An example is the project with economics students at the Universidad del Valle in Colombia (an EFL situation), where, because "for administrative reasons, timetables could not be arranged to make it possible for us to attend each other's classes" (de Escorcia 1984, p.136), the ESP course was taught in parallel to the economics course, using the same texts. Another example was the "phased" approach at the University of Birmingham (Henderson & Skehan 1980):

> joint planning of the work both at the macro level - overall definition of aims, agreement on syllabus, specification of teaching methods and relationship between English and Economics inputs etc - as well as the micro level shared materials, (informal) knowledge about exactly what students were doing, what points they had reached, feedback about students' problems etc. (1980, p.44).

I used this method at the PNG University of Technology with first-year architecture students because timetable constraints did not allow the architecture lecturer and myself to be in the classroom together. The students had a studio class for seven hours a week in which the architecture teacher taught drawing and other architectural skills. I taught language and communication skills in my classes, and the two sets of skills were combined in a series of joint projects, the most enjoyable of which was an annual week-long fieldtrip to study the traditional architecture and social life of two remote villages in PNG. The resulting assignments were joint marked by the architecture lecturer and myself.

The aim of the collaborative method is the integration of content and language skills, providing constant monitoring of the situation at all stages by both the language specialist and the subject specialist. It is often used in situations in which the students have a specific task, e.g. writing a research dissertation, or preparing to enter an English-medium university (Johns & Dudley-Evans 1980). In these situations the language needs are very apparent to the students and the English course is complementary to the students' subject. However, it can also be used in situations where English is supplementary, as in our use of it with first-year architecture students in PNG.

Team teaching

True team teaching (intervention) is where the ESP teacher and the subject teacher co-operate fully throughout the course, including sharing the classroom. The whole course is fully worked out by both - design, materials, methodology, assessment - and the two teachers are present in the classroom at all, or most, times. It has been defined as:

> a type of instructional organization, involving teaching personnel and the students assigned to them, in which two or more teachers are given responsibility, working together, for all or a significant part of the instruction of the same group of students. (Shaplin 1964a, p.15)

An early ESP case study of team teaching at the University of Birmingham is given in Johns & Dudley-Evans (1980). I have used this method to teach final-year communication engineering students and chemical technology students in PNG. All these examples took place inside a traditional classroom. Team teaching can take place outside the traditional classroom, for example on an architecture fieldtrip (Barron 1986). The connection between English and architecture became very apparent to the students in this situation because they needed to interview people to obtain their data and they needed to record them accurately.

Successful team teaching requires considerable organisational and management skills. Detailed planning is required at all stages, regular meetings have to be arranged, and potential clashes, such as those which arise as a result of differences in status, temperament or pedagogical methods, have to be kept to a minimum. Team teaching probably works best with two teachers, as most of the reported experiments in ESP involve two teachers, but it can involve more. In American schools, teams of three to six teachers have been used (Anderson 1964, p.192-194).

The purpose of team teaching is to achieve educational efficiency by exploiting the fact that cognitive development and language development proceed together. The mixture of skills and content inherent in ESP is too complex and specialised for one person alone. Splitting the work horizontally according to specialisms (Shaplin 1964b, p.81-87) with both teachers in the classroom together is an efficient way of teaching and more than justifies the cost because the whole is "much more than the sum of its parts" (Jackson & Price 1981, p.38) and a level of informality develops "leading to a level of interaction much higher than would normally be the case" (Jackson & Price 1981, p.40). This is an observation I have noticed in my own experiences team teaching the final year communications engineering students at the PNG University of Technology. The level of motivation, aided by the fact that the students had just returned from six months' industrial training where they learnt the importance of good communication skills, the number of jokes, and the quality of the work were all greater than in other classes.

Team teaching thus has a hidden agenda, to develop the classroom as a social system (Shaplin 1964b, p.66).

> The individual identifies with the role, with the group, and with the goals of the organization in terms of his need dispositions, his personal aspirations and expectations, his needs to express himself, and his peculiar demands for rewards and satisfactions. (Shaplin 1964b, p.68)

The result is perhaps the creation of a group culture (Shaplin 1964b, p.69) in which "the group establishes its own climate or culture in adjustment to the demands of the formal organization and of the individuals which make up the group" (Shaplin 1964b, p.69). In the most successful situations, all the members of the group are in harmony with one another, resulting in an ideal environment for syntonic learning (Papert 1980, p.63) to take place because each student is able to relate to both the subject and the other members of the group.

Figure 1: Overview of co-operative projects in ESP

Reference	Country	Level	Subject	Stage/Input
Informant				
Huckin & Olsen 1984	USA	EFL	genetics	rhetorical features
Jacobson 1986	USA	EFL	physics	needs analysis
Love 1991	Zimbabwe	ESL	geology	needs analysis, materials
Morray 1980	Algeria	EFL	electrical engineering	need analysis, materials
Pettinari 1983	USA	ESL	medicine	rhetorical features
Ramani et al. 1988	India	ESL	management, electronics	needs analysis
Schmidt 1981	USA	EFL	business administration	needs analysis
Selinker 1979	USA	EFL	genetics	rhetorical features
Tarone et al. 1982	USA	EFL	astrophysics	grammatical features
Zumrawi 1984	Sudan	EFL	electrical engineering	course design
Consultant				
Adams-Smith 1980	Kuwait	EFL	medicine	materials, content, panel member
Barron 1991, 1992, forthcoming	PNG	ESL	engineering	teaching, marking assessment
Gee et al. 1984	UK	EFL	civil engineering	needs analysis, materials, tutorials assessment
Hansen & Van Hammen 1980	Algeria	EFL	electrical engineering	teaching
Koh & Cheung 1985	Singapore	ESL	engineering	content, marking
van Naerssen & Brennan 1992	USA	ESL	sociology	
Smyth et al. 1980 1980	UK		technology, life sciences, physical sciences, sociology	testing

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Collaborator

Barron 1986	PNG	ESL	architecture	needs analysis, course design, materials
de Escorcia 1984	Colombia	EFL	economics	needs analysis, materials, course design
Henderson & Skehan 1980	UK	EFL	economics	all
Houghton 1980	UK	EFL	accounting	materials
King nd	Colombia	EFL	several (not stated)	needs analysis, materials, course design
Siegel & Dube 1982	PANG	ESL		
Skehan 1980	UK	EFL	economics	all
Snow et al. 1989	USA	NS/ESL	not stated	course design, materials

Colleague

Chamberlain 1980	Zambia (Namibian refugees)	ESL	mathematics	all
Dudley-Evans 1984	Singapore	ESL	building	all
Ivanic et al. 1980	UK	NS	sociology, history, home economics	all
Jackson & Price 1981	UK	NS/EFL	civil engineering	all
Johns & Dudley-Evans 1980	UK	EFL	transportation, biology	all
Moorhouse 1980	UK	NS	literacy	all
Tshuma & Morrison 1992	Zimbabwe	ESL	law	all

A Continuum

I have described the four methods separately, but I do not wish to give the impression that they are discrete. The boundaries between them are not distinct, but overlap quite considerably. The differences lie in the degree of co-operation that takes place between the ESP unit and other departments. Subject specialists can thus be placed on a continuum that reflects their level of involvement in the ESP programme. This is shown in figure 2.

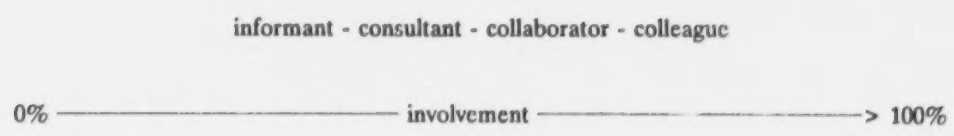

Figure 2: The co-operative continuum

Discussion: the advantages and disadvantages

The advantages of the various co-operative teaching methods can be divided into two: overt and covert. The overt advantages are that ESP teachers can find out what they do not know from the experts. There is the possibility, of course, that the ESP teachers may be in danger of "believing all that they hear" (Swales 1990, p.129). This is a real danger that should be guarded against. Other advantages are advantageous to the promotion of interdisciplinary relations between departments that might not otherwise exist. Tangible results are joint articles (e.g. Tshuma & Morrison 1992), modification of the subject teacher's language to make it understandable to students in lectures (Morray 1980, p.88), and even changes in the content subject as a result of the insights provided by applied linguistics (Stephenson nd: p.8).

Co-operative methods have very tangible results for the students. One of these is that they should become aware of the direct relationship that English has for their subjects of study, particularly if the complementary aspect is made explicit to them. Snow, Met & Genessee (1989, p.215) report that these methods promote higher order skills than those in traditional learning methods. This in turn promotes advanced levels of proficiency in language, leading to more elaborate language skills and more cognitively demanding tasks. This can lead to modification of the expectations that subject teachers have regarding the communicative and academic capabilities of the students.

There is some evidence for this claim. Van Naerssen and Brennan report that L2 students of sociology at the University of Pennsylvania "surprised their sociology professors by producing better data and reports than many of their L1 classmates" (1992) after they had been prepared by the ESP unit for their task of eliciting attitudes to religion in inner-city homes. At the PNG University of Technology, two effects of the close collaboration between subject lecturers and ESP teachers were noticed. Firstly, the high quality of the technical paper written by students for a project that combined their background knowledge of traditional technology with the consultative method (Barron 1991) encouraged engineering lecturers to increase the written requirements of some of their courses in the first and second years. Secondly, the engineering departments introduced project work into the foundation year course because of its role in teaching key engineering concepts, in encouraging an advanced level of communication, and in generating a high level of motivation.

The covert advantages are often of considerable benefit to the ESP unit and in the long run to the students. Swales (1990, p.129) raises the objection that these methods are very time consuming. This is true, but the investment in time can pay big dividends which more than compensate for the amount of time invested. From my own and my colleagues' experience at the PNG University of Technology, co-operating with other departments resulted in two important benefits for the Language and Communication Studies (LCS) Department. Firstly, it led to increased hours for English courses. We were also asked to provide new courses, particularly for final-year students. This enabled us to increase staff numbers and train more Papua New Guineans to take over when the expatriates left. It also enabled us to provide a more valid course for first-year students knowing that skills needed later could be dealt with in the final year after they had undergone a period of industrial training when they learnt the value of good communication skills. Motivation on these final-year courses was generally high because of this.

The second unforeseen benefit was in the political arena. Partly as a result of the very good relationships established with lecturers in other departments through various co-operative teaching projects, the LCS Department found that it had important allies on key committees and support for important decisions affecting it. One of these was a decision by the university to maintain the status of the department vis-a-vis the other departments. The co-operative teaching experiments were a major factor in creating a positive image of the department and in considerably raising its profile. This same positive effect was also found by Ramani and her colleagues in India as a result of their co-operation with colleagues in technical departments (Ramani et al. 1988, p.87).

Swales states, "We might conclude, then, that the role of the subject specialist informant ... remains somewhat controversial" (1990, p.129). Given the very positive benefits that can accrue to the ESP unit as a result of the good relationships established with informants, their role is a vital element in the raising of the profile of ESP units worldwide. The use of co-operative methods is the first step in establishing parity with other disciplines.

The advantages should not obscure some of the problems associated with co-operative teaching methods. These include timetabling problems when two or more staff members need to be in the same classroom, the clashes that may occur when two very different pedagogic methods meet in the classroom, and a rapid turnover of staff necessitating the establishment of new relationships at regular intervals. For example, I worked with six different studio masters of five nationalities in eight years of collaborative teaching of the first-year architecture students at the PNG University of Technology. A similar problem in Colombia was the relocation of staff within a department away from responsibility for liaising with the English department (King nd: p.36). Another problem is persuading the financial controllers that team teaching is economic.

Team teaching is very time consuming and very demanding on organisational and management skills. Clear goals have to be determined, otherwise conflicts will arise. Major differences in personality have to be kept in check, and major problems can occur if the group takes on goals and intentions that are at variance with the original objectives of the team. The aims, objectives and teaching methods have to take account of the strengths and particularly the weaknesses of all members of the team. It can be particularly disastrous if one member of the team has an agenda that differs from the goals that the team has determined.

Cultural Syntonicity

All the methods described above have a single purpose: to enable ESP teachers to ensure that the language competence of the learners develops with their academic competence. Cognitive competence and communicative competence cannot be separated. Studies on young children show that language learning and cognitive development proceed together:

> In making sense out of what people are saying and in speaking in a sensible fashion themselves, children relate linguistic forms to social situations. Part of their acquired knowledge of a linguistic form is the set of relations that obtain between that form and social situations, just as part of their acquired knowledge of a social situation includes the linguistic forms that define or characterize it. (Ochs 1988, p.2)

Ochs goes on to state that the result of this "is that children are acquiring linguistic and sociocultural knowledge hand-in-hand as they assume various communicative and social roles in language activities" (1988, p.17). In other words, "language is not acquired without culture" (Ochs 1988, p.38). EFL/ESL students entering university are in a similar position:

> For the student new to a discipline, the task of learning the distinctive mode of analysis ... is indivisible from the task of learning the language of the discipline... One area of development cannot proceed without the other. (Ballard & Clanchy 1988, p.17)

Teaching the students involves initiating them into the discipline, or culture, since "the process of acquiring language is embedded in the process of socialization of knowledge" (Ochs 1988, p.3):

> Instruction in any discipline is acculturation, or the bringing of the student into the "interpretative community" of the discipline. And there is evidence that each discipline is also a "rhetorical community," which is to say a field with certain norms, expectations, and conventions with respect to writing. (Purves 1986, p.39)

In ESP, the notion of distinct "discourse communities" (Swales 1990, p.24-27) is now a reality, each with one or more genres. Love (1991), for example, suggests that an introductory textbook of geology has the purpose of initiating the newcomer into the cognitive model of geology, and that this is realised by the structure of chapters and in discourse cycles within chapters.

The direct association of culture and language, with each subject as a separate culture with its own genres, is not how language learning in the EFL or ESL situation has traditionally proceeded:

> For children who are L2 learners ... traditional methods for teaching second/foreign languages often dissociate language learning from cognitive or academic development. In contrast, an integrated approach brings these domains together in instruction. (Snow et al. 1989, p.201-202)

What ESP aims to do is to associate language learning with academic development so that the students become competent members of their subject. It does so by identifying key activities (genres) specific to a particular subject, drawing on topics in the subject (or culture), and teaching how and why the genres are used. Co-operative teaching methods are an efficient means of combining the language and cultural expertise so that academic development and language development can proceed hand in hand.

The assumption here is that each subject is a separate culture, identified as such by differences in methodology, artefacts, discourse features, and even dress. The definition of culture underlying this is the one proposed by Goodenough:

> Culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, and to do so in any role they accept for any one of themselves. (Goodenough 1957, p.167)

Culture by this definition is a semiotic system (Geertz 1973, p.5) whose purpose is to search for meaning. It is "the end product of learning" (Goodenough 1957, p.167). ESP aims to provide the students with the means to search for meaning in the subjects (or cultures) they are entering, the successful end product of which is acceptance as a member of the subject (or culture). Co-operative teaching methods are a positive means of ensuring that the content subject and ESP are firmly connected so that this end is achieved. The co-operation results in cultural syntonicity (Papert 1980, p.68), i.e. coherence between the subject (culture) and ESP.

Most ESP teachers have not been initiated into these cultures, which is why they need help, and the cry for help at the beginning of this article is a clear signal of that need. Acknowledgement that help is needed is made explicit by the use of co-operative methods such as those outlined here. The result is a professional approach which is acknowledged by colleagues in other departments, a necessary pre-requisite to becoming accepted as fit members of the academic culture. Anthropology (Bernard 1988), the ethnography of communication (Saville-Troike 1982) and genre analysis (Swales 1990) all provide ESP teachers with the tools to use with the methods to ensure a professional approach. There is no longer any excuse for ESP teachers to blunder around in ignorance and incur the disrespect of subject specialists, as Henderson and Skehan describe:

> Most language teachers designing ESP courses have met the subject specialist who conveys his unspoken or overt feelings that language teachers manage to miss the point, concentrate on the inessential, or generally blunder around in areas where they are not competent. (1980, p.41)

Conclusion

Co-operative teaching methods are flexible because they can be used with students of different levels and in different countries. They are perhaps most effective when the English course or component is complementary to the content subject, rather than supplementary. The level of involvement of the subject specialist can be specified, depending on the circumstances. Thus the subject specialist can be informant, consultant, collaborator or colleague. The methods have proven to be robust, with an unbroken use of more than a hundred years in engineering. It is perhaps fitting that ESP, so involved as it is with engineering, should follow in such an honourable engineering tradition.

Lessons can be learnt from engineering's experience of co-operating with other subjects. Engineering has had to fight hard to establish its status in universities, particularly in the UK. An important part of winning this battle has been the forging of allies in well established subjects such as mathematics. One of the strategies engineering has used in this battle has been the development of close interdisciplinary ties by means of co-operative teaching methods undertaken with departments such as mathematics and physics, and they have probably been an important factor in the battle to achieve its current status. ESP should emulate what engineering has done for more than 100 years and exploit co-operative teaching relationships with other departments. To do so would be the first step in enhancing its status, as well as providing ESP teachers with the means of finding out what they do not know.

Note

[1] I have used the phrase "ESP unit" as a superordinate to refer to departments in which ESP teaching takes place. These include Language Centre, English Centre, Language & Communication Studies Department, Communication Skills Centre, etc. When referring to specific departments I have used the actual name of the department, e.g. the Department of Language and Communication Studies at the PNG University of Technology.

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From "Remedial English" to "English enhancement". (So, What Else is New?)

Desmond Allison

The paper presents and discusses the case against a "remedial" view and in favour of an "enhancement" account of programmes that set out to improve students' command of English as a second language in the course of an English-medium college or university education. It goes on to describe and assess the transition from "remedial" to "enhancement" provisions within academic curricula at The University of Hong Kong. Other related issues include the "academic" or "general" scope of English enhancement programmes, and the criteria and processes by which such programmes may best be evaluated.

Introduction.

Although still in use, the label "remedial English" has never promised a very satisfying account of the work of English language teaching units in universities and colleges. The term "English enhancement" appears to be gaining currency, at least in Hong Kong, as a preferred descriptor for English language programmes in contexts where English is a second-language medium of higher education for the students being taught. It is time to ask how far this choice of nomenclature offers more than new packaging for familiar products, and to judge whether it can fairly be associated with a more adequate conceptualisation of issues and tasks. The rhetorical question in this paper's title, therefore, is intended to commence a genuine enquiry, as well as colloquially to evoke the initial scepticism of many outside (and some within) the English language teaching field towards current conceptions of our work.

The discussion will focus mainly on university education, notably in contexts where English is the second-language medium of education. Particular reference will be made to developments in the planning and provision of English language programmes at The University of Hong Kong (to be traditionally if informally abbreviated as HKU). The author's involvement in this work precludes a wholly dispassionate standpoint, but should provide an informed basis for the description and constructive criticism to be attempted in the course of the paper.

It may be a useful prelude to reflect on how studies in particular settings can contribute to knowledge. A common theme in discussions about language and other educational problems and policies in local contexts, including that of Hong Kong, concerns the special nature of the community and its circumstances, and the extent to which experiences from other contexts may be found relevant, or judged inapplicable, to the local situation. The converse question - how far local experiences may usefully inform people living and working in other contexts - seems equally valid, though it is perhaps less frequently asked.

Difficulties in reconciling general insights with local circumstances can already prove informative to a wider educational community. Any implementation of ideas and theories must take place in a context; some tension between idea and context, as between theory and practice, is a common and perhaps universal feature of such implementation. More specific problems may also not be as uniquely local as is sometimes believed, and useful parallels or analogies can often be drawn. (Indeed, it is frequently the similarity between different situations that limits the international impact of local studies, since these can too easily rediscover knowledge, rather than relating, reinterpreting and extending it.) Provided that educational research is expected to contribute to and enrich our thinking, without necessarily yielding answers that apply independently of context, differences among situations should act as a stimulus, not as a barrier, to shared exploration of important and challenging questions.

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The issues surrounding "remedial English" offer a case in point. There are certainly differences between situations where English as a Second Language (ESL) programmes are offered to non-native English speakers in predominantly native-speaker universities and colleges, as often occurs in the U.S.A. for instance, and other ESL situations, as in Hong Kong, where the student population consists almost wholly of non-native English speakers. While these differences affect detailed argumentation over "remedial English", we shall also find that many concerns are widely shared.

"Ending Remediation"? Insufficiencies of "remedial English" as a guiding concept for tertiary English language work.

The case against "remediation" The inadequacies of a remedial account of tertiary English language teaching (other than English as an academic subject in degree studies) have provided a target for professional criticism in recent years. Swales (1990) states the case succinctly and compellingly:

> ...if there is one factor that has debilitated academic English programs more than any other around the world, it has been the concept of remediation - that we have nothing to teach but that which should have been taught before. (Swales, 1990, p.2).

Swales' comment neatly encapsulates the basic problem, from which others follow. A remedial view of teaching programmes suggests that schoolleavers have nothing left to learn about how to use English, or indeed language, in academic and professional communication, except to the extent that secondary or high schools have failed to cover their own syllabuses. This expectation would seem highly doubtful even for native speakers (whose needs will not be directly considered in this paper), and all the more so for students working in a second language.

Remedial students A related perspective is a belief that ESL courses in English-medium universities are and should be designed to ensure minimal curricular survival for a minority of linguistically disadvantaged or less able students, who encounter serious and persistent problems of a kind that normal students do not experience, or do not need assistance with. Where this view becomes untenable on grounds of student numbers, it may assume another form, in judgements that the mass of students are not up to some "proper standard" - a sorry state of affairs, that is obviously all the fault of the schools - and that students therefore still need remedial help. (Readers are invited to judge how far these hypothetical views are the stuff of straw men or of still-encountered prejudices.) An obvious problem with a characterisation of students as "remedial" is that students themselves may feel stigmatised or may have a poor self-image, and so may well be resentful because they have been assigned to follow ESL courses.

Remedial teachers Another common though contingent difficulty is that "remedial" perceptions of ESL programmes and students may be accompanied by dismissive views, held and aired in disregard of facts, concerning the academic and professional standards of ESL teaching staff. This is especially likely in universities. Remedial teachers in schools can be highly respected colleagues, who are seen to do a difficult job with slow learners, but such a conception has no obvious counterpart in university teaching and learning. More is at issue here than simple pride and prejudice: there may also be genuine fears that "remedial" ESL teachers will fail to appreciate the nature and concerns of academic curricula. Even sympathetic colleagues, who respect the contribution of ESL teachers, are often unclear about the nature and frequent intellectual challenge of English language teaching at tertiary level.

Remedial teaching units Prevailing views of "remedial" ESL programmes, students and teachers typically reflect on the (lack of) status and influence of teaching units that are associated with ESL work. Such units - even though they may be called "centres" - typically occupy the periphery of university life, especially when it comes to wider curricular questions. Once a remedial brief has been accepted, such a state of affairs appears normal and right to many people, since remedial teaching, however laudable, is not what universities are for. ESL units may then find it difficult either to gain access to the more influential university committees or to undertake professional discussions on an equal footing with some (less supportive) academic departments.

Response within the profession From this account, it will not be surprising to observe that English language teachers in many contexts are concerned to rid themselves of the "remedial" tag, as part of an effort to obtain greater recognition of and respect for the work they do, the students they seek to educate, the ESL profession itself, and the centrality of language in the curriculum. If one is convinced (as I am) that students in English-medium universities have important things left to learn if they are to understand and use English effectively in academic communication, and that, in many situations, English language teaching will be of value in and beyond the wider academic context, one will intellectually oppose the labelling of tertiary English language work in terms of remediation. When (following Swales, loc. cit.) this label is seen as not only inaccurate and pejorative, but as debilitating to the English teaching enterprise, then professional opposition to its use will be all the stronger.

"Ending Remediation": Some Cautionary Remarks So far, perhaps, so good; yet such advocacy is not without dangers. Some recent discussions have assumed crusading overtones. In the introduction to her edited book with the programmatic title "Ending Remediation: Linking ESL and Content in Higher Education", Benesch (1988, p.1-2) argues that it is time to abandon the notion of ESL as a form of remediation. She points to a resolution, passed by the 1987 TESOL Convention, that calls for the accreditation of ESL courses in institutions of higher education. This resolution opposes a remedial view of ESL courses, recognising them (in the context of the U.S.A.) as instances of foreign language instruction. It sees such courses as meriting full academic credit for their intellectual demands on students.

Heady and appealing stuff for the profession! We are all sensitive to the question of whether academic "credit" should be granted (or, in more fortunate situations, should continue to be granted) for English language courses. If we pursue this goal, however, we need to be clear about our reasons. A feature of Benesch's account is the extent to which the case against "remedial English" in the U.S.A. is avowedly resource-driven: it is linked to a threat to funding for courses that until recently were accepted as credit-bearing. Not only is the dissatisfaction with the traditional "remedial" label linked to moves by education boards to remove or reduce credit (and therefore funding) for courses so named; Benesch even suggests that:

> One positive outcome of the threat to ESL college credit may be a shift from remedial, skills-oriented ESL instruction, which presents language as a set of discrete bits of knowledge such as "the sentence", "the paragraph" and "-ed endings", toward communicative and whole language approaches... (Benesch 1988, p.1).

One hopes that such developments have been motivated, and that this outcome is seen as "positive", on the grounds that "communicative and whole language approaches" can better help students to make appropriate and effective communicative choices... and not just because the new rationale will help to preserve college credit status. (It is only right to note that the book does reveal ample evidence of curricular concerns and insights.)

A hostile critic, then, or a devil's advocate could have fun with some of the arguments commonly put forward by English teachers. Objections to "remedial English", and aspirations towards credit status for English language courses, can be linked uncomfortably closely to the pursuit of professional survival or advancement. Of course, we can reply that these motives are not in themselves selfish or base; that we believe in the value of our teaching programmes, and of the professional contributions we can make. Nonetheless, the long-term interests of students, universities (and other colleges) and the profession itself plainly call for diagnoses and prescriptions that are primarily motivated by the welfare of "clients" rather than of practitioners.

With this point in mind, it is also crucial to distinguish a rejection of "remediation" as the guiding concept for all tertiary English language work from the very different (and far more traditional) view that there should be no place at all for remedial English teaching in a university. To argue that "remedial English" is a bad name for an entire ESL teaching operation is not to imply that there will be no call for any remedial provision within such operations. As always, we must take care when preparing to change the bathwater.

The case for "English enhancement"

The term "English enhancement" is widely used in Hong Kong at present to distinguish mainstream tertiary ESL work from remediation. Other terms might serve this purpose just as effectively, and arguments for the use of "English enhancement" might be transferable to such terms.

In outline form, the case for describing English language provision at (English-medium) university level as "English enhancement", and not in remedial terms, is that:

all students can usefully develop their abilities in, and awareness of, academic communication. (I am using "academic" broadly here, referring to all communication that permeates and helps to constitute a curriculum; this can sometimes include elements of professional communication.)

development of communicative abilities will be necessary if students are to fulfil their potential in respect of viable contemporary curricula, that take account of rapid and continuing changes in knowledge itself and in societal expectations, and will be essential if students are to be equipped to assume leading roles in later professional life.

these needs are compounded by the problems of working in and through a second language.

in many cases (including Hong Kong), these needs may be affected by changes in the social and educational background of student communities. (Perhaps rather simplistically, one can anticipate that increased numbers of students from less advantaged school backgrounds will have all the more to learn about communicative and study expectations in academic settings.)

(in practice, at least) separate attention to "English" is a necessary element in a university's effective provision for these needs.

When viewed in this way, English enhancement becomes a natural element in a curriculum for ESL university students.

This proclamation raises important questions about the alleged "needs" to be addressed and "abilities" to be developed. It would be naive to suggest that these were wholly empirical questions, since answers will always depend in part on the value attached to particular abilities and the importance of particular needs and purposes. That said, empirical enquiry remains crucial to our work in seeking professional answers. We shall take up this theme later in the paper.

Of course, calling an English language programme "English enhancement" will not and should not suffice to alter people's perceptions and value judgements. To convince students, and others, that what is on offer is significantly more and other than a remedial course will require quite a lot of explanation, negotiation and demonstration.

One danger for professionals at this point is too ready acceptance of an assumption that what English enhancement programmes teach must be "new" in relation to what appears in school syllabuses. Content that is obviously new is initially attractive if one seeks to convince others quickly that a syllabus is not a remedial one. This preoccupation could lead, however, to overly exclusive emphasis on selected areas of academic discourse, or on metalanguage, or on rather narrowly specialised tasks such as compiling an academic bibliography. Such a response would fall into the trap of implicitly accepting a negative valuation of other and fundamental areas of English language teaching that are also properly part of a university programme.

It is surely time that educators, of whatever academic specialism, consciously dissociated themselves from the naive yet pervasive view that learning should take place just once, and that relearning in new contexts is only necessary if previous schooling has been faulty. Difficulties experienced by

university students in such matters as grasping the gist of a written text, or seeing an implied meaning, ought not, on reflection, to suggest to anyone that schools must somehow have omitted or failed to teach "reading for main ideas" or "reading for implied meanings" for more than a decade. Students who cannot cope with such skills at school simply do not reach university. Successful students who do reach university will encounter texts, and problems, that are more advanced. For this reason, teaching that is also more advanced may quite properly concern itself - at an appropriate level of textual sophistication - with skills and strategies that build upon earlier experiences in schools. To dub all such teaching "remedial" on the grounds that students had previously "done" main ideas, implied meanings and the like, would be neither illuminating nor helpful.

There may, of course, be good reasons for concern over what has or has not been taught and learned in a school system. But even when a university is dissatisfied (as what university is not?) with the educational standards of its incoming students, it still has to appreciate and not to deny what these standards are. Entire intakes cannot sensibly be described as requiring remedial help. ESL university students should be actively encouraged to improve their English, but (the point is worth repeating) they should not be stigmatised for the levels of proficiency they had attained on admission to their university courses.

The professional case supported and developed in this paper is that the interests of students and of universities, as well as those of English teachers, are poorly served by a remedial view of tertiary English language teaching as a whole. These issues will now be further explored in one context.

"English enhancement" at the University of Hong Kong: Some features of the situation

Some of the features that will distinguish the Hong Kong situation from that of ESL classes in the U.S.A. (or the U.K., Australia, etc.) also characterise other places where the student population is relatively homogeneous and where English, a second language for almost all students, is the medium of education. Features will be discussed and not just described, but various refinements in argumentation are omitted in this outline.

Students and English language English is a second language for almost all students at HKU. There are no native speaker student norms to provide a comparative basis for determining minimal ("threshold level") expectations for non-native performance in English.

There are, it is true, colleges in America where the majority of students are non-native speakers of English - see Hirsch (1988) - but most ESL students in the U.S. are being prepared or helped to work alongside native speaker students, whose presence affects institutional norms. Of course, many Faculty members at HKU are familiar with native English-speaking student populations in other universities, and some indirect effect on staff expectations of student communicative abilities cannot be ruled out.

Calling English at HKU a "second" rather than a "foreign" language for students might need justification. English is used generally as the medium for lectures and classes (apart from Chinese studies or foreign language classes), and in some tutorials, so it is not confined to the English language class. It is, however, not much used informally by most students. Students' previous experience of English at schools in Hong Kong ranges from widespread formal and instructional use to negligible use outside the English class itself.

University admissions requirements specify a certain level of achievement (grade D or above) in the local Use of English examination, thus selecting from roughly the upper half of the Form 7 (equivalent to 12th grade) population in terms of English grades.

English and academic survival At HKU, improving one's English to ensure academic survival is not a real problem for individuals. Student failure is quite rare, and is not normally attributable to poor English.

It follows that the "threshold level" concept, whereby the aim of an ESL course is to bring students up to a point at which they can manage to operate in an English-medium curriculum, is largely irrelevant at HKU. It is important to be clear on this point, as it is easy to argue loosely (as I for one have sometimes done) that students "need" ESL courses to help them "cope with their studies". There is indeed a widely perceived need for institutionally supported ESL work at HKU to help students to master English in academic communication (and sometimes in professional communication), but any implication of mere survival needs is unintended and unjustified. The intention is to make students more effective and articulate.

Reasons for this wish are not hard to find. There are concerns over the present and prospective quality of graduates, and ultimately of the curriculum. Perceptions of standards, including standards in English, will affect the standing of HKU graduates and of the university, and the value placed on the contribution made by the university to the community. The choice of English as the medium of education is also an important part of the university's local and international identity. For such reasons, the need actively to maintain and enhance English within HKU curricula is broadly recognised in principle.

The curricular role of English can vary widely across programmes. In some cases, immediate demands placed upon students' communicative abilities appear minimal - yet there is a longer-term need for greater fluency by the time students graduate. In other programmes, immediate as well as long-term demands are considerable.

The issue of longer-term needs is important and can become fairly complex. Some students whose English standard is relatively high may also be more likely to take up careers for which an advanced command of English will prove crucial: such students still have important things to learn. (In Hong Kong, systems analysts are said to face greater demands on their English than are computer programmers - because of differences in general job specifications and also in local communicative settings that will affect the need for English rather than Cantonese.) When this point is taken in conjunction with the low probability of academic failure, the argument is sometimes heard that English teaching would in fact be better directed towards the more proficient rather than the less proficient students - an argument that, if taken literally, soon raises anti-élitist hackles. In my view, however, this argument ought not to cause alarm: it constitutes one (sometimes polemically stated) part of a well-motivated case for extending English enhancement provision to all students, rather than restricting it to the less proficient.

One suspects that comparable observations and arguments will apply in many universities where the medium is English and the students are predominantly ESL users. The standards of intake to a university, including English language standards, will depend on the state of affairs in the local schools and community. High failure rates in a university, in many educational systems, would reflect adversely upon the institution. Therefore, the demands of the curriculum tend to be adjusted to what can properly be expected of the incoming student population. These internal pressures, however, will be offset by concerns over international comparability of standards, and over what should be expected of graduates. One consequence, with implications that are not always appreciated, is that ESL-medium universities will need to take action to support their curricula by supporting the medium itself (see also Bruce, 1990).

Communicative expectations A number of questions arise about communicative abilities in HKU, and generally in ESL-medium universities. What expectations do lecturers have of student performance, and what tasks are set? (Low expectations may be reflected in fewer linguistic demands, and hence fewer immediate problems.) To what extent do students become able to express themselves clearly and cogently, in their specialist field and more widely? At what stage, if at all, do such abilities assume immediate importance? While comparability with international norms is to some extent assured through a system of external examiners, there are still fears that many students manage to succeed in their examinations but do not become effective communicators. However, research is needed to substantiate or modify such views.

School background of students A common school curriculum can formally be assumed for the large majority of HKU students. It is relatively easy to determine, from syllabus statements, what schools should in principle have taught. The vast majority of students enter from Anglo-Chinese schools, which

currently teach over 90% of all secondary pupils in Hong Kong, rather than from Chinese-medium schools. Actual experiences in respect of English teaching and use will, however, still be quite varied.

Funding for "remedial" teaching "Remedial" language teaching has attracted considerable government funding in Hong Kong at tertiary level, through the University and Polytechnic Grants Committee (UPGC). The UPGC has reassured receiving institutions that "remedial" English can be broadly defined; the term appears to have been used in order to mark the goal of improving students' command of English (rather than teaching English language and literature as academic subjects). The remedial label has thus been and may still be used by administrators to describe plans for English language improvement. Use has more recently been made of the term "language enhancement", in recognition of arguments put forward by academics. To some extent, this development appears also to be associated with a greater recognition of the role that "academic communication" including participatory activities can play in enriching learning and making it more effective. (The issue of "general English" or "English for academic purposes" will be taken up later in the paper.)

Current plans for English enhancement at HKU.

This account of developments at The University of Hong Kong offers an illustration of processes of institutional planning and change. Readers are nonetheless cautioned that parts of this section may prove to be of primarily local interest.

Remedial provision For more than 20 years, the Language Centre (LC) at HKU has had a remedial teaching brief. The extent of LC teaching activities has been a function of resourcing constraints and has mainly reflected demand that was established in the early years. Thus, for example, most undergraduates in the Faculty of Arts have attended compulsory LC courses, whereas, until recently, only a small number of Social Science students attended voluntary courses. For the Faculties of Science and Engineering, course numbers have been fixed, so that any increase in total intake to either Faculty has brought a corresponding decrease in the proportion of students following English courses (and an increase in those "exempted" from taking these courses). Table 1 shows percentage figures for the years 1988/9 to 1991/2.

Figures in Table 1 (excluding the paper in Computer Science) show that the proportion of students receiving English language teaching in different programmes has varied greatly. The distribution does not correspond to any comparable differences in English language ability across Faculties. For example, an in-house analysis of Use of English results for incoming HKU students in 1990/91 revealed that approximately 64% of first-year Arts students had achieved a grade C or above - the minimum acceptable grade at HKU being a grade D - whereas the corresponding figure for Science students was only 28%. As Table 1 shows, however, some 87% of Arts students, compared with just 26% of Science students, received what was administratively still termed "remedial" teaching of English.

Table 1: Reported percentages of first-year undergraduates per Faculty or Departmental programme receiving in-sessional tuition in English from the Language Centre over a four-year period. (Note 1)

	1988/89	1989/90	1990/91	1991/92	Hrs	NOTE:
ARTS	91	92	83	87	60	3
ENGIN.	36	38	34	32	20	4
Civil	0	100	100	100	10	
CS IS	0	0	0	100	48	
SCI	35	35	36	26	60	5
S SCI	20	20	34	67	60	6
ARCH	46	47	41	35	20	7
Surv.	65	61	49	48	20	
MED	16	16	15	14	20	8
LAW	0	0	0	0	0	9
DENT	0	0	0	0	0	10
ED	0	0	0	0	0	11

Notes to Table 1:

1. Percentages were obtained with the help of Language Centre staff; some figures for 1988/90 are approximations.
2. Hrs: class hours in 1991/92.
3. ARTS: Faculty of Arts: percentages based on a placement test; no resource constraint.
4. ENGIN: Faculty of Engineering report-writing course: fixed number (168 students). Civil: oral course for civil and structural engineering students. CS IS: Computer Science - Information Systems: note that this paper in a first-year degree programme is not a "remedial" course.
5. SCI: Faculty of Science: fixed intake, but total intake has grown, hence fall in percentage figure for 1991/92.
6. S SCI: Faculty of Social Sciences. 1990/91 figure from 100% of first-year students for B.B.A. (Bachelor in Business Administration) and 11% of other students; 1991/92 figure - all students except those of the School of Economics.
7. ARCH: Faculty of Architecture - Dept. of Architecture;
   Surv: Dept. of Surveying.
8. MED: Faculty of Medicine. In-sessional course only (also a 6-hour pre-sessional course on medical vocabulary for all first-year students.)

9-11 LAW;DENT;ED: Faculties of Law, Dentistry and Education: no provision. (Law employs its own language tutor.)

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R.K. Johnson (1986) comments on the totally inappropriate use of the word "remedial" in the context of Anglo-Chinese secondary schools in Hong Kong. This is because remedial teachers were evenly distributed amongst schools, without reference to the very different student ability levels; thus, remedial students in "Band 1" schools would not have been remedial in "Band 2" schools, and might well have been outstandingly proficient in "Band 5" schools. As Johnson (1986, p.70) observes:

> The only criterion which appears to be satisfied by the distribution of remedial posts is administrative tidiness.

Remedial provisions at HKU, summarised in Table 1, plainly have not satisfied even this last criterion. The insufficiencies and inconsistencies of these provisions in relation to perceived needs have not been lost on members of LC staff, or on some of the less favoured Faculties; however, any response to proposals for more English language teaching has had to depend on availability of additional funding from Faculty or University budgets.

The later 1980s saw considerable community and university concern over language issues in education, and a wider reappraisal was undertaken in HKU of what English language measures were needed. The following outline is intended as a clear if condensed and simplified account of the resulting developments.

Proposal for a 'School of English' Concerns over the English language needs and standards of undergraduates throughout HKU led to considerable critical examination of current provision for English enhancement within the university. The problems were seen to call for an academic solution, and the Professor of English Language at that time, Roy Harris, was prominent among those consulted.

A feature of Harris' stance that attracted wide interest and support in principle, not least among staff members of the LC, was his emphasis on the development of "intellectual fluency" as the appropriate aim for an English enhancement programme. While this term (like most) is open to varied interpretations, its use appeared to serve notice on "remedial" approaches as insufficient or inappropriate to current conceptions of the English language situation at HKU.

In 1989, Professor Harris presented his original proposal and rationale for a School of English. Harris et al (1991) sets out a later version of the proposal (in a document that includes a detailed in-house bibliography). The idea was to establish a School of English that would bring together the university's expertise in all forms of tertiary English teaching (i.e. the Department of English Language and Literature and members of the English section of the Language Centre), together with new posts, in order to address issues comprehensively rather than piecemeal.

Subsequent developments have seen the abandoning of the School of English proposal in favour of the creation of a separate unit for English enhancement, that excludes the Department of English Language and Literature.

English courses in HKU degree curricula? In November 1989, Senate agreed in principle that "general English courses... should be conducted by English specialists as compulsory credit-earning courses for all undergraduates throughout first-degree curricula." This wording did not pre-empt further consideration of what kinds of courses and specialists were appropriate for the task. What may have been intended by "general English" will call for attention below. The term "credit-earning" was imprecise as to detail (critics were quick to point out that the university does not operate a unit-credit system), but appeared clear in principle, and its use in the context of first-degree curricula distanced the university from remedial solutions.

Academic Communication and Study Skills ("ACSS") as a model? In May 1990, a proposal for an "Academic Communication and Study Skills" (ACSS) course was first put forward by staff members of the Language Centre. Although its focus was on induction of students on first arrival at university, the ACSS proposal was language-intensive (reflecting needs perceived by the Department of Management Studies, which was interested in piloting the scheme), and the ACSS scheme has since become associated with the development of English enhancement programmes that have academic communication as their

focus. One result of the initial proposal was an intensive induction course for incoming first-year BBA students in September 1990; another was a 60-hour in-sessional first-year English language course, on a pilot basis and without pre-empting other course proposals for English enhancement.

"ACSS" subsequently became a cover term for the programme-specific first-year in-sessional courses that are being designed at HKU as part of each Faculty's approach towards English enhancement within first-degree curricula. The focus has thus shifted from induction towards language enhancement, seen very much in the context of "academic communication" and of the development of appropriate skills and strategies for this. (Bruce, forthcoming, offers a detailed account of HKU's ACSS course for Social Sciences, in the solely in-sessional form that has been piloted in 1991/92.)

In June 1991, the HKU Senate approved in principle "that English enhancement be integrated into each first degree curriculum, in accordance with the schedule below, (not reproduced here), on the basis that the nature of the programme would be fully discussed and agreed with each faculty in the light of its special requirements." (Senate minute 27 of 4.6.91.) The pilot ACSS course was accepted as the model for these developments, within the process of consultation and agreement that was set out.

It can be noted that "administrative tidiness", and also a form of fairness, is embodied in the plans to extend English enhancement programmes of comparable duration to all first-year curricula. In a context of enhancement rather than remedial teaching, this solution is also intellectually respectable: use of the term "enhancement" in any instance implies that there is room for worthwhile progress, but does not offer an assessment of ability relative to other students.

A point that has caused some confusion in discussions is that the particular ACSS course material being piloted with the Faculty of Social Sciences would clearly not be suitable for most Faculties. While this point is obvious to the course developers, there have sometimes been fears that the adoption of an ACSS model would result in inappropriate material being imposed on other students. It is in fact the model for course development, and not the particular instance, that serves as the basis for other work.

Creation of an "English Centre" The changes that have been outlined required considerable committee work at a level of detail before plans could be presented and endorsed. In 1990/91, HKU's "English Centre" was established, initially as a small planning unit with three full-time posts. Two posts were temporarily filled from January 1991 by four half-time secondments, giving balanced representation from two teaching units - the English Department and the Language Centre. This initiative extended and further formalised the collaboration that was taking place through committee work (relevant subcommittees of the Senate Working Party on Educational Policy), and through limited teaching exchanges.

The need for a separate planning unit has always been open to debate. Those most closely involved with the English Centre have seen its creation, in the form described, as a temporary expedient to advance and give fuller shape to the university's emerging policy on English enhancement. The English Centre has offered a forum for productive exchanges, between selected members from two teaching units, over the educational philosophy of an English enhancement programme and over practical ideas for implementation, including the ACSS schedule that has been referred to. It has also created some distance between these planners and the two teaching units. This may have helped short-term developments, in that the English Centre was not closely identified with one set of entrenched interests or one long-established professional stance, but it is clearly not a desirable long-term prescription.

An independent appraisal by a Working Party on the Teaching of English in late 1991 recommended the creation of a separate teaching Centre responsible for English enhancement, comprising posts in the present English Centre, the English section of the Language Centre, and any additional posts. The recommended name for the new Centre was the Centre for Applied English Studies. (At the time of writing, this name remains a matter for discussion.) The earlier proposal for a School of English including the Department of English Language and Literature has thus been abandoned. It is hoped that some members of the English Department (and of other Departments, such as Curriculum Studies) will take an interest in the work of the new Centre, perhaps by accepting honorary Fellowships.

Defining what "English enhancement" throughout a university should be like, and whose responsibility it should be, can be much less self-evident to the university than it may appear to English language teachers. This is at least partly because courses and teachers that set out to improve students' command of English are still identified in many quarters with remedial teaching, and may thus be viewed with suspicion when academic curricula are being discussed and developed.

In the HKU situation, it is thus encouraging to note that the Report of the Working Party on the Teaching of English, submitted in December 1991, has acknowledged that:

> In the past poor English has been seen as a remedial problem but this is now perceived as a failed approach since students are not motivated by courses which are neither credit bearing nor seen as relevant to their main studies. (para. 3, p.2).

The point should be emphasised that it is the remedial approach itself, and not the courses that were developed under the constraints and the label of that approach, that is perceived as having failed. Indeed, the proposed constitution of the new Centre has given the most obvious recognition and respect to the work and the staff of the English section of the Language Centre, while also sending a wider message that the English enhancement programme requires changes in the terms of reference and in academic accountability for the English courses to be taught at HKU.

English enhancement and its evaluation

In this closing discussion, we examine two broad issues relating to the design and evaluation of English enhancement programmes. Implications will arise for the role of English language teachers in a university, and may suggest ways in which we still need to move away from a remedial past.

General English or English for Academic Purposes? Of the many terminological debates that can beguile academics in the English language teaching field, one persistent distinction has been that between "general English" and "English for academic purposes" (EAP). At HKU, it is probably a fair if simplified summary to suggest that the LC has always been associated with an EAP stance on English enhancement (though this omits considerable in-house debate in the LC itself), whereas many other academics with an interest in the issue of English standards had, and in some instances still have, reservations about the whole EAP perspective and tradition.

This local debate is one enactment of a professional discussion that ranges widely in both space and time. Within Hong Kong itself, issues affecting HKU are apt to be taken up in the course of wider debates over educational standards and values in the territory. In what was unfortunately a somewhat patchily informed polemic at a recent conference, G. Bickley (1991) queried the role of HKU in regard to what we are here calling English enhancement. According to her, the university has at different times seen English as merely a means to its own ends within the academic curriculum, or as a more general end in itself. Bickley's position was that an academic-purpose view of English courses at HKU was not responsive to community wishes and expectations, which would be better served by courses that see (general) English as a goal in itself.

In brief, I would respond by arguing that "general English" proponents typically take an unjustifiably narrow view of "English for academic purposes". They associate these purposes with a narrow register of English, and interpret them as quite restricted even within university life, rather than as being concerned with students' complete experience of English throughout the curriculum. They also implicitly dismiss the curriculum itself, as though it were quite unrelated to professional and other community contexts. None of these assumptions is at all warranted a priori. (I would agree, though, that such dangers need to be kept in view when an EAP course is being designed or evaluated.)

EAP proponents (including myself) tend to see advocacy of "general English" as at best an unexceptionable if vaguely-worded espousal of broad aims, but at worst as a recipe for avoiding any commitment to delimiting what should be taught and learned on an English enhancement course. Use of the term can too easily cover a reluctance on the part of course designers to specify contexts and

purposes they are assuming as they choose topics and develop materials. Comparable problems can arise when "general proficiency" is taken as the object of language testing.

One area where an emphasis on "general" English can retain some practical value among English teachers is in the development of self-access materials. Encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning is a vital part of an English enhancement programme, and a particularly wide range and diversity of materials and topics is needed to appeal to the interests of different students. We must accept that the expression "general English" sometimes serves pragmatically in conveying messages about variety. (There still seems no compelling reason to distance such richness from "academic purposes" - since when did "a university education" suggest that personal and intellectual inquiry and interests should confine itself to a core syllabus of approved topics and texts?)

What is at stake here is the scope of an English enhancement programme and its relation to a context. If an EAP course, with its very limited hours, is targetting academic communication throughout a curriculum, and if that curriculum itself is educationally sound, such a course ought not to be unduly narrow in coverage. What it might offer is an immediate contextual focus for the learning, practice and use of English as a medium of education.

As Reeves (1991) has indicated, the criterion of "fitness for purpose" is preeminent in contemporary approaches towards quality in education. Such awareness in EAP course design is not to be confused with narrow instumentalism; there is every reason to avoid such an association when designing EAP programmes and materials to enhance the communicative abilities of students in English-medium universities. In advocating attention to an already wide range of contexts and purposes in course design for English enhancement, one is subscribing to the belief that an improved awareness of these contexts and purposes will be more "generally" productive than an absence of such awareness.

If the status and relevance of EAP in English enhancement still needs to be defended among English teachers, it is not surprising if students, and teachers of other subjects, tend to favour the sound of "general English" and to be initially suspicious of "academic" or any other "specific purposes". A holistic pursuit of "English" can indeed have important merits as a motivating factor; we should not lose sight of this in pursuing a more contextualised approach. A failure to contextualise our teaching, however, in ways that are more than ad hoc for particular lessons, could all too easily lead it back to a remedial role, conceived of as teaching only that which should have been taught before...

Criteria and processes in programme evaluation English enhancement course designers and teachers in many situations have to decide and to explain to others what a course with a very limited number of hours can be expected to achieve, and to suggest how far this is worth devoting time and resources to achieving. With increasing concerns over accountability in education generally, the evaluation of enhancement programmes is now an important professional area in its own right, and there is widespread discussion of language programme evaluation in the applied linguistics literature. For some selected references, see Leung (1991).

A typically central problem in the design and evaluation of an educational programme is to reconcile the reasonable expectation that worthwhile learning should be demonstrated during a course with the wish to pursue complex long-term aims that will not lend themselves to the prompt measurement of gain. The ideal answer is doubtless to pursue the long-term goals through the achievable goals, rather than in contradistinction to them, but this is far from easy to realise in practice. It is already a demanding task to determine goals that are both achievable and worthwhile. Among the difficulties in ensuring a balanced English enhancement course that will prepare students for future demands, there can be a tension between the development of abilities where gain may be more easily demonstrable (as often for oral presentation skills), and other abilities that may be at least as crucial for students but where rapidly clearcut progress is less likely to be experienced (as often in essay and report writing).

A further requirement for a comprehensive English enhancement programme design is for what is learned in an EAP course to be reinforced and developed in a wider curricular context. In other words, the curriculum itself needs to ensure that sufficiently rich academic purposes exist for the use of language, specifically of English. An educational point that can hardly be sufficiently emphasised in this

connection is that improving students' abilities in academic communication (in English) is of central importance to the curriculum itself. Helping learners to articulate, discuss and apply the content of a course is not a sideshow or a minor social accomplishment (as it sometimes seems to be viewed in Hong Kong); the development of these abilities ought to be central to a university education. Language-intensive work then becomes a vital means in the service of greater ends.

The place of language, and specifically of English, throughout the undergraduate curriculum also assumes major importance for an English enhancement programme itself if we look to long-term goals of improving measurable proficiency, of sustaining gains achieved in specific abilities and confidence in aspects of language use, and of encouraging learner responsibility and independence. A comprehensive enhancement programme would need to build appropriate opportunities for language-intensive work into the mainstream curriculum itself (probably in the form of seminar work and project work).

Such developments can only come about as a collaborative venture, of which the potential difficulties will need no elaboration. There are nevertheless some encouraging signs for the planning of such ventures at HKU. The Report of the Working Party on the Teaching of English (1991) clearly recognises the limitations on what any 60-hour course will achieve and the need to effect other curricular changes as part of a full English enhancement programme; it also sees a role for the English Centre in this respect. The School of Business Studies has recently (early 1992) invited input from English enhancement staff in the course of a curriculum review, including plans for a second-year course in Business Communications.

The design and the evaluation of an English enhancement programme are not wholly empirical activities. As we earlier remarked, a lot depends on values that people attach to different needs and purposes for English, and on broad educational values. Recognition of this complex truth should not, however, be taken to diminish the crucial role that empirical enquiry serves in a professional evaluation. Empirical studies will be needed to examine measurable levels of proficiency and specified abilities in using English, and probably also to investigate attitudes and perceptions of students and other concerned parties (such as academic staff or prospective employers). Modes of enquiry could include language tests, questionnaire studies, interviews (provided that they cover a suitably wide range of people), ratings of performance in oral presentations, seminar discussions or report writing, and studies of particular features in student spoken or written texts at different stages of a course.

The case of the ACSS pilot course at HKU in 1991/92 may further illustrate some of these concerns in context. The course lasts for 60 teaching hours, spread over 20 teaching weeks in the first year of three-year degree programmes in Social Sciences, Business Administration, and Social Work and Social Administration. The criteria and processes by which achievement on the ACSS course should be evaluated are being explored and developed in concert with members of Faculty and with students, though decisions remain the responsibility of the course coordinator and team. Achievement of some of the agreed aims and objectives for the course can be evaluated through ratings, by subject and language teachers, of oral presentations of project work and of written project reports, as well as by end-of-course integrative testing of students' abilities in understanding and applying spoken and written source materials to an essay task in limited time. (Some other objectives, such as increasing the willingness and effectiveness of students in asking questions, might also be possible to assess within ACSS classrooms, but this would not be very useful as the goal is to facilitate such behaviour elsewhere in the curriculum.)

One problem in programme design and evaluation can be to convince sceptics of the relevance of whatever objectives may be established or of measures that may be used. If clear evidence of improvement in "English" is being demanded, but with no specific notion of what this involves or of how it should be demonstrated, English enhancement professionals will have an explanatory task ahead of them. ("General English" proves of serious disservice as a guiding concept.) Distinctions between receptive and productive knowledge of English, or between knowledge of the language and abilities to make more effective use of that knowledge in particular communicative contexts can take time for English teachers to convey, and for others to appreciate. Yet such matters are crucial to an informed appreciation of what is being taught and what has or has not been well learned.

Another practical difficulty in the design and evaluation of English enhancement programmes may be, as it sometimes is at HKU, that some members of Faculty and (to a lesser degree) some students appear convinced that students' needs for and problems with English are already well known, and that enquiry into such matters is largely superfluous. In fact, diagnoses reported by academic staff, in interviews and through questionnaires, sometimes vary widely on quite basic points (e.g. as to whether the main task should be to improve students' writing, or to make them more effective as speakers, or to do both), and there is often no obvious reason other than personal predilection to account for these differences. (There are nonetheless some characteristic tendencies. A fairly consistent feature of interview and questionnaire data is that productive abilities are emphasised by staff more than receptive abilities. Students themselves tend to attach more importance to listening abilities - which prove from interview data to range from insufficient command of vocabulary to difficulties with high speeds and varied accents in some lecture courses - but to believe that they have no reading problems.)

Another problem in extending English enhancement work into new areas can be to convince Faculty colleagues who are unfamiliar with or sceptical about the findings of many applied linguists in interlanguage studies that persistence of errors in student speech and writing does not constitute evidence that English language teaching has failed.

Such difficulties are, of course, common in the English teaching profession, and are not specific to one situation. They can be considerable, yet their importance should not be over-estimated. Faculty colleagues and students who are seriously concerned about English are unlikely to fear that the entire English teaching profession is conspiring to complicate a task that should be simple. The difficulties and complexities of advanced language learning are actually widely recognised, and the long and uncertain road towards progress has been the experience of many in learning another language.

To return briefly to the question posed in the title: our main concerns in charting arguments and measures for "English enhancement" have proved to be not so much with innovation as with evolutionary development. As other academics become more aware that language has a place within the curriculum, and that communication serves a role in the development and application of knowledge itself, English enhancement teachers should need to feel less defensive about the difficulties and uncertainties of our own role. Instant answers to many central questions are not available, and academics who give serious attention to "English" issues will appreciate this. They will also expect confidence and willingness on our part to work with them to specify achievable goals that are agreed to be important. In such a climate, our work can more easily move beyond the concept of remediation and can assume its place as an important and integral part of a wider educational endeavour; and we ourselves can become increasingly confident in the judgement and understanding of our academic peers.

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Self-Access For Self-Directed Learning

Philip Benson

This paper discusses the relationship between self-directed learning and self-access as a system of organising learning resources. The first part of the paper outlines the skills needed for self-directed learning in a self-access centre. The second part describes how self-access English resources at Hong Kong University Language Centre have been reorganised to help develop these skills. This includes the use of a PC database to help students plan programmes of study.

Introduction

The literature on self-instruction in language learning includes several descriptions of self access centres (SAC) and how they work (Barnett & Jordan 1991; Dickinson 1987; Miller 1992; Mitchener 1991; Riley & Zoppis, 1985; Sheerin 1990). But these tend to be descriptive or practical with little discussion of the influence of organisational systems on the learning process. This paper argues that the influence can be positive, and that a system of self-access organisation can even become a tool for learners to develop self-directed learning skills. In the first part of the paper I will discuss self-directed learning in a SAC, the skills that it calls for and the ways in which the SAC can help. In the second part I will show how a project to reorganise self-access English resources in the Language Centre at Hong Kong University (HKU)[1] has been oriented towards the development of self-directed learning skills. The aim of the project is to make self-access resources more accessible and more informative, and in the final section I will outline the role of a computer database in achieving this.

Self-access and self-directed learning

Self-access and self-directed learning are not the same thing (Dickinson 1987, p.10; Sheerin 1991, p.144). Self-access refers to the design and organisation of resources, whereas self-direction is a learning situation which calls for certain skills on the part of the learner if it is to be productive. The two are closely connected, however, and self-access might be defined as the design and organisation of resources for self-directed learning, if not for the fact that many SAC users are in reality other-directed to one degree or another. Nevertheless, the assumption that SAC users are self-directed is a useful starting point for considering self-access systems, since this is likely to be the case at least some of the time.

At HKU the largest group of SAC users are students on 60-hour EAP courses of which 20 hours are timetabled for 'self-access'. These students can turn to their class teachers and to learner training materials in making a gradual transition from other-direction to self-direction. But because many teachers see self-direction or learner autonomy as an educational goal in its own right, there is an expectation that the SAC should be able to support entirely self-directed learners. This is also a practical need since EAP courses are currently offered only to first-year undergraduates, and self-access represents an opportunity to continue study in subsequent years.

The nature of self-direction dictates a need for learner-support from within the self-access system itself. In this paper, self-directed learning is understood in terms of learners taking responsibility for major decisions such as why, what, where, when and how they are going to study. At HKU students initially tend to be unaccustomed to making these kinds of decisions and they are faced with a need to acquire new learning skills for self-access. But there seems to be a quality about self-direction which makes attempts to teach it self-contradictory. Learning techniques can be taught, but it seems to be impossible to teach learners how to set and evaluate their own objectives without somehow compromising the integrity of self-direction. There is therefore a strong logic to the notion that the best way for the learner to acquire the skills needed for self-direction is to practise self-directed learning and to reflect on it (Holec 1985, p.180).

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If it is accepted, then, that the function of a self-access system is largely to support and promote self-directed learning (Sheerin 1991, p.144), the important issues are the identification of the skills needed for self-directed learning and the system which will best support their acquisition through a process of discovery.

Self-directed learning skills

The identification of self-directed learning skills and the ways in which the SAC can support their development can be approached by analyzing the steps which a learner must take in following a programme of learning focused on the SAC. These are illustrated in figure 1:

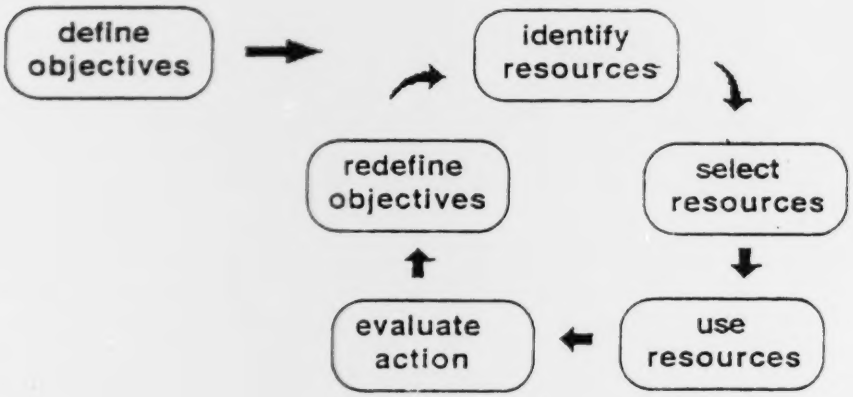

Figure 1 - Stages in a programme of self-directed learning

Before discussing these steps in detail, two general points can be made. Firstly, the process of self-directed learning is cyclical and progressive, and the development of a programme of learning depends largely upon evaluation and redefinition of objectives. Secondly, failure at any stage of the process may influence the learner's feeling of satisfaction and willingness to persist with self-directed learning. But failures at earlier stages can be turned to the learner's advantage if there is an effective evaluation of the learning activity and a redefinition of objectives. It is important, therefore, for the SAC to support the learner throughout the cycle, and especially at the stages of evaluation and redefinition of objectives.

Defining objectives: When students first approach the SAC it is difficult to predict what objectives they will have in mind, how they will express them or indeed whether they will have any clearly focused objectives at all. Objectives need not necessarily be expressed in terms of a learning goal, but it is clearly important that the users select materials with some course of action in mind.

The SAC cannot define objectives for the learner, but it can help by channelling thought into categories which match the resources available. Browsing is an important aid in defining objectives, but the physical grouping of materials can only represent one method of classification. If various methods of classification are available (skills which can be improved, language points covered, content, medium and so on) learners may more easily define objectives which match their own perceptions of language learning with the resources available.

Identifying resources: Once objectives have been defined, the SAC can help by informing the learner of the options available. This could be more than a simple list of materials, and could include options outside the SAC. The SAC should also inform the learner when no options are available, and perhaps offer help on the reformulation or adjustment of objectives.

Selecting resources: When more than one option corresponds to an objective the learner must choose from among them. The SAC should therefore be able to inform the learner of the differences between resources and the implications of selecting them.

Using resources: There are a number of aspects to this: locating selected items and any extra materials needed to use them, allocating time for the activity, interpreting the nature of the task, following instructions, obtaining feedback on activities, and so on. On these points the SAC should provide explicit instructions at the point at which the learner needs them.

Evaluating action: When the learner has finished with an activity, there is almost certain to be some kind of evaluation of it. The learner's feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with an activity constitute an initial form of evaluation, and the SAC may help to make these feelings more specific by ensuring that information is available which allows a comparison of the results of the activity with the stated aim of the materials and the learner's original objective. If there is a feeling of dissatisfaction, the learner should be able to decide whether it is a new type of activity or a new objective which is needed.

The evaluation stage seems to be the most difficult for a self-access system to address directly. The system may explicitly prompt the learner at the end of an activity, but this cannot ensure that evaluation will take place. It is at this point, therefore, that external help may be needed most to encourage learners to develop their own evaluation of activities they have carried out.

Redefining objectives: At this point, the learner needs to decide if a new or modified objective is needed, or if the same objective can be productively repeated. The self-access system must, therefore, be flexible enough to allow comparison of materials according to criteria which are relevant to the learner, so that the next selection will represent a step forward.

To summarize these steps, the development of self-directed learning skills appears to be a process of trial and error in which the possibilities for error are numerous. If self-directed learning does not run smoothly, learners may feel that it is a poor option and abandon it altogether. For this reason, it is also important that the SAC should relieve learners of as many mechanical decisions as possible by providing explicit directions and instructions wherever they may be needed. Learners are unlikely to benefit from a search for obscurely located materials, or from a hunt for a hidden answer key.

More positively, self-directed learning appears to hinge on decisions about objectives and methods of realising them. While the SAC cannot make decisions for learners or force them to make decisions for themselves, it can facilitate decision-making by being as explicit and informative as possible in terms which approach learners' perceptions of language learning. This involves the use of various criteria of classification and the provision of information on the similarities and differences between materials. Since decisions are made at several stages, information needs to be available in more than one form. It must also be provided in terms which the learner can understand, and in forms which are easily accessible. The next section describes how the Language Centre at HKU has tried to build these features into a SAC.

The self-access system at HKU

The reorganisation of self-access resources at HKU was prompted by the introduction of self-access into EAP courses and a feeling that the existing system had grown somewhat inaccessible. For EAP students self-access is a course requirement, and while the opportunity to try a new way of learning seems to be appreciated, there is a clear need for support both from course tutors and from the SAC itself. An opportunity therefore arose to rethink the system along lines which would support the development of self-directed learning skills.

An opportunity also arose to consider the role of a database in the system as a whole and its value as an aid to self-directed learning. The conclusions of the reorganisation are discussed below under the headings of organisation, classification and indexing, and the computer database.

Organisation: At present, the SAC contains five kinds of materials: video-cassettes, audio-cassettes, computer software, books and worksheets. These are displayed on separate shelves. Software items (video-cassettes, audio-cassettes and computer software) are located close to the areas where they are used, and the print materials (books and worksheets) are near the entrance. Students are free to take items from the shelves and use them within the SAC. In many cases there is a relationship between print material and items of software although they are shelved separately (for example, a worksheet designed to be used with a video-cassette). These relationships are indicated by cross-references and users may have to gather the materials they need from more than one location. These aspects of organization have been retained. Open access shelving allows users to browse, which is a valuable learning activity in its own right (Sheerin 1991, p.148), and the major classification by physical form corresponds to classification by medium (which appears to be an important criterion for users).

Two changes have been made to the organisation of materials: the introduction of sub-classification and the development of the worksheet section as an access route to the resources. Formerly materials within a medium were assigned code numbers in the order that they were added to the SAC. Although students were readily able to find materials by using a card index, the code numbers had no particular significance and the order in which items were shelved was meaningless. Two major sub-classifications have been introduced. Firstly, in the video, audio and print sections materials are divided into authentic materials (not originally produced for language learning) and courseware (in-house and commercially produced materials). Secondly, each category is sub-classified; authentic materials by genre and topic, and courseware by language learning categories. These categories are intuitive and are intended to be meaningful to users; they are based on materials available and do not follow any a priori schema (cf. Riley and Zoppis 1985, p.290). Code numbers now include a two- letter code which determines the order in which they are shelved. These two-letter codes are allocated in such a way that related materials are shelved close to each other. Initially codes were designed to be mnemonic (e.g. LC = Listening Comprehension), but this is no longer necessarily the case because priority has been given to the grouping of items on the shelf display.

The second change in the system of organisation was to develop the worksheet section of the SAC as the initial access route to self-directed learning. An assumption is made here that guided worksheet-type activities are an easier introduction to self-directed learning than direct access to authentic materials, and learners are encouraged to access software-based items through worksheets in the first instance. The design and organisation of the worksheet section aims to give as much assistance to the learner as possible. Both in-house and commercially-produced materials tend not to be explicit about their objectives and functions (often for good reasons) and one change has been to provide information on each worksheet in the form of a coversheet. This coversheet gives information on the functions of the worksheet (described more fully under *indexing* below), a descriptive outline of its objectives and contents, and instructions aimed to give the user an overview of the activity. The general aim of the coversheet is to express the content of the worksheet as action. Because information is on a separate sheet attached to the worksheet, it is not obtrusive, but it is still available at several stages: browsing and selection, use and evaluation.

Indexing: Indexing is a different procedure from coding in that it has no effect on the physical organisation of materials. Also, while coding involves the allocation of items to categories, indexing is more a question of making explicit information which is implicit in the materials. Riley and Zoppis (1985, p.292 ff.) and Dickinson (1987, p.114) describe indexing systems for video and audio materials based on content and linguistic information. At HKU we have been more concerned in the first instance with indexing of worksheets and the system developed differs from others in focusing on functional categories. These are based on what can be done with the materials and reasons for selecting them. The aim is to provide information which will help the learner to make decisions based on the learning options suggested by materials rather than their content alone.

The definition of headings and the categories listed under them has been one of the most difficult aspects of indexing, and the headings finally chosen are as follows:

1. Main language **skill** which the activity is designed to improve or practice.
2. Types of **activities** or exercises included in the activity.
3. Any **language points** stressed in the activity.
4. Any non-linguistic **topic** covered in the activity.
5. The **medium** of the activity (video, audio, computer, pair work, etc.).
6. An estimate of the **time** needed for the activity.

An indication of the level of the worksheet may also be added. Of the six headings listed four correspond to the functions of the worksheet and two (language point and topic) to the content. All of the headings correspond to criteria which learners might employ in selecting worksheets, and the indexing information is recorded on worksheet cover sheets so that it can be used in conjunction with the outline and instructions as a basis for selection and evaluation of worksheets. Because information is clearly organised under headings, the learner can focus on the similarities and differences between activities, which is an essential part of deciding where to go next.

The computer database: A computer database appears to be a logical solution to the problem of dealing with large quantities of indexed information. Databases for SAC cataloguing are discussed by Dickinson (1987, p.115) and Sheerin (1991, p.148) whose comments are not entirely positive. Barnett and Jordan (1991) are more positive in showing how a database is used to help students identify 'paths of study' in an SAC. The use of a database in the SAC at HKU had been planned for some time, but it proved impossible to implement until the resources themselves had been reorganised, suggesting that as much attention needs to be given to the underlying information system as to the technicalities of the database. Also, how the database will be used calls for careful consideration. The use of databases in SACs is a logical development of their use in libraries, but the library catalogue model may not be the best for self-access. In fact, at HKU the database is not intended as a replacement for the card index. It is designed more as a learner training tool used to explore resources and plan activities.

The database designed for the SAC at HKU makes use of a PC relational database management package. All information relating to self-access resources is stored in the database, which can be used to print out lists, index cards and labels. At present, however, SAC users only access the part of the database which covers worksheets (this will be extended to cover authentic materials using different criteria at a later date). The database is a relatively simple one consisting of 8 columns: the code number and title of the worksheet and the six headings described under 'indexing'. Although there are several methods of storing this kind of indexed information, the computer database is unique in its capacity to sort and group items under various headings. The physical layout of the resources, for example, can only represent one type of grouping, whereas the computer can display eight different types of grouping (corresponding to the eight column headings) and more if combinations of columns are included. For this reason the computer allows the learners to display materials according to various methods of classification, and compare and differentiate them.

Users are not expected to use the database to search for the location of known items (the card index would probably be the quicker alternative in any case). It is mainly designed to search for groups of items according to index categories. Examples of possible searches under each heading are (the relevant keyword is underlined):

1. **Skill**: activities designed to improve pronunciation.
2. **Activity**: activities using the CALL program Gapmaster.
3. **Language point**: activities focused on sentence connectors.
4. **Topic**: activities focused on pop music.
5. **Medium**: activities using video.
6. **Time**: activities which are likely to take less than 30 minutes.

Users can, of course, combine searches on different columns. This narrows down the number of items displayed, but also increases the possibility of a negative response. Combined searches are an effective method of choosing a way forward in a programme of self-directed learning. The learner may choose to continue on the same track (all columns the same), or move in a different direction (one or more columns different).

There are inevitably certain limitations to the database. Firstly, the use of a database constrains the terms which can be used in indexing. Care has to be taken to express the same idea in consistent terms (and to avoid typing errors). A significant limitation is the difficulty of matching the words in the database to the user's choice of words. For example, a user who enters popular music for topic will be disappointed if the database entry reads pop music. This is a problem inherent in PC database packages and although there may be some positive spin-off in training learners to think clearly in terms of categories, frustration seems a more likely result. Unfortunately most PC database packages do not readily allow direct selection from a menu, but the user can choose a category from a list of those available in a particular column and then type it in.

There is also the possibility of consulting a 'glossary' in which keywords in the database are defined. The user can look up a keyword in the glossary, or search the glosses for a similar word. For example, the term 'social English' (used frequently by HKU students, but not used as a category in the database) could be found in the glosses for the keywords speaking, conversation and colloquial; a user who wants to 'improve social English' could then proceed to search for these items in the database. There is also a likelihood that users will have difficulty in distinguishing between the column headings, so a facility is also provided which allows users to search for a keyword in all columns.

These are, of course, imperfect solutions to difficult problems. It is clear that a certain amount of training is needed which cannot be given by the system itself (Dickinson 1987, p.115). This must cover operation of the computer, use of a catalogue system and the specifics of the SAC system itself. The limitations of the database will be most apparent, however, in the early stages of use and will diminish as users become familiar with the system and its categories. The important question is whether this learning represents a useful investment of time and effort. Since the reward is an increased ability to manipulate language learning categories and increased control over learning, the answer should be yes.

Conclusion

The reorganisation project described here is far from complete and it has yet to be tested extensively. It is also based on a considerable amount of assumption and guesswork about the way in which learners approach self-access. In fact, one of the effects of the project has been to reveal just how little we really know about the motives and decision-making processes of learners in self-access. One other important lesson we have learnt is that solutions in self-access flow from the specific needs of the institution and its students rather than from comprehensive schema. For these reasons, the particular organisational measures described here are less important than the general approach. Thinking about self-access organisation in terms of the development of self-directed learning skills does seem to be productive, however, and by setting in motion a system based on this kind of thinking, we are likely to discover more about self-directed learning and what it entails.

Note

[1] The SAC at HKU is known as the Practice Lab. This project is still in progress and has been carried out in collaboration with David Gardner and Chris Copland.

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Assessing Students at Tertiary Level: How Can We Improve?

Jo A. Lewkowicz

This paper develops a number of issues, related to assessment of students undergoing English enhancement courses, raised at a workshop on assessment held at the Language Centre[1] of HKU. The primary focus of the workshop was to update staff about current assessment practices in the various programmes run by the Language Centre and to discuss issues of professional interest. The workshop threw light on some of the persistent problems in assessment that are experienced by a rapidly expanding tertiary teaching programme and should prove illuminating to others facing a similar situation. Although many problems remained unresolved, the healthy exchange of ideas reported has suggested lines for future investigation and development.

Introduction

Assessment is a pivotal activity in any teaching operation and it is essential that teachers within an institution are informed of the methods used and their underlying rationale. Such a process not only helps ensure a code of practice but also affords a starting point from which change and development can take place. As an institution grows and the number of students and teachers increase, there is likely to be a healthy divergence of views as to the functions and best modes of assessing students, yet it is important that assessment remains meaningful to the student and does not become idiosyncratic. It is equally important that change is allowed to evolve and that such evolution is a result of extensive discussion, piloting and evaluation as well as careful scrutiny of the methods used to effect the change.

The Situation

The English Section of the Language Centre is responsible for a number of courses across different faculties and the importance given to formal assessment depends largely on the accountability of the Language Centre to the department or faculty it is assisting. This in turn is a function of the percentage of first year students taught on the English courses and the relative importance of each course in relation to other faculty-based courses, i.e. whether the results of the English course are noted on the student's transcript and whether or not this course is credit-bearing. Table 1 summarizes present practice. Notice as one reads across the courses from left to right, how the degree of accountability to faculty increases. In the Medical Faculty the weakest 15% of the first year undergraduate students are required to take an English course and to satisfy Language Centre criteria, whereas in the Engineering Faculty all students of the Information Stream of Computer Science are required to take such a course and it counts as one full paper in their degree programme.

The assessment procedures in place have all been subjected to systematic and principled development and modification. Course designers as well as a small group of testers within the Centre take an active role in writing language tests, moderating and piloting them in preparation for reviewing students' performance. It would therefore appear that the present situation is satisfactory and does not require immediate change. However, if the Centre is to ensure that its assessment procedures are appropriate for its students, as well as informative and cost-effective, then it must continue to recognise that review needs to be built into the system.

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Table 1: An Overview of the Current Assessment[1] Procedures 1991/92

	Surveying/ Architecture	Medics	Arts[2]	Engineering	Science	Social Sciences	Business Communication
Pre-course tests	nil	oral: seminar (Selection)	• writing (Selection) • oral: seminar (Course evaluation & pedagogy)	• report writing • word completion • proofreading (Selection)	• writing • listening • reading (Selection)	nil	nil[3]
Continuous Assessment	nil	oral presentation	oral, writing projects	report writing	writing, projects	oral, writing, projects	projects
Post-course tests	nil	oral: seminar (Achievement)	• integrated: reading, listening & writing (Achievement) • oral: seminar (Course evaluation & pedagogy)	report writing (Achievement)	writing, listening (Achievement)	integrated: reading, listening & writing (Achievement)	• language usage • written communication • concepts of communication (Achievement)

Notes: (1) "Assessment" in this context refers to assessment which is systematically recorded in such official records as Language Centre student cards, Faculty transcripts or reports to Faculty. (2) A mid-course test is administered in December to selected Arts students for release purpose. (3) An oral test assessing information transfer skills is administered in the first lesson for diagnostic purposes.

What sort of Assessment?

Any reflection on current assessment procedure and practice first needed to consider:
- what type of assessment is most appropriate for the courses being run? and
- should there be any changes to existing practice as English enhancement courses are extended across all faculties of the university?

Two extreme scenarios were considered. The first was relying totally on an end-of-course test for student assessment whereas the second was assessing student performance entirely on course work through continuous assessment. After detailed discussion both these extreme views were rejected since it was recognised that tests and continuous assessment fulfil a different function and both contribute to the building up of student profiles.

Tests

Such summative measures are formal, standardized procedures that provide more objective information about students' performance. Although students may be given their grade or percentage mark for their performance, they do not receive detailed feedback and the focus for course evaluation purposes is on how well (or poorly) the group has performed rather than on the individual student. Hence the test information may be crucial for faculty and the administration of the Language Centre, but of more limited value to the student. Students at the end of any course will ultimately be interested in whether they have passed or failed, while the Language Centre may, and frequently does, want to assess gain over time, which is a relevant consideration for course evaluation.

Continuous Assessment

With no continuous assessment, too much emphasis would be put on the test. The teaching would be affected and students would have little incentive to work consistently throughout the year. The same would most probably hold true if the continuous assessment were not graded and students knew it did not count towards their final assessment.

However, for continuous assessment, grades should be secondary to the feedback given to students. If students are to be motivated they need to know what they have done well and where they have failed to achieve. They also need to know what objectives they should be striving towards, and here lies a fundamental weakness in many assessment systems. It is too often assumed that students know what the assessor is looking for and what criteria will be used for assessment purposes. Withholding this information may be a result of it not being systematized and readily available in a form that would be comprehensible to the students. But it is necessary information not only for the students but also for staff, especially in a situation like the Language Centre of the University of Hong Kong (HKU) where a large number of teachers are teaching the same courses and it is desirable for them to be using the same criteria for assessing course work.

Accepting the principle of sharing assessment criteria with students, be it for tests or continuous assessment, has serious implications for course design. The criteria have to be explicit. In addition, teachers have to be ready to demystify these during the course of their teaching and to adhere to them once they have been set in place. This means that a time lag has to be built in before any further changes or developments can take place.

Recent research by Alderson and his colleagues (reported in Alderson, 1991a) into test method has indicated that even among 'experts' there may be little agreement as to what a test is actually testing or to the difficulty of test items or tasks. It is therefore likely that marking criteria are subject to similar variations of interpretation which would suggest that teachers may need to be 'trained' in the use of such criteria if reliability is to be maintained. This would be in line with findings reported by Bachman (1992) that a high degree of agreement can be obtained among raters when they are trained.

The frequency and magnitude of continually assessed work is another problem area especially at tertiary level. On the one hand, students want and need frequent feedback and plenty of opportunity

to practise but this may lead to the trivialisation of tasks. On the other hand, if tasks are to be authentic (a point which will be expanded later in this paper) and replicate the academic study cycle, then the number of tasks will automatically be limited. Language Centre courses in fact attempt to replicate the study cycle experienced by students in their own faculties. Hence there is a tendency to put great emphasis on project work which requires the students to define their 'problem', search for their own information, assimilate it from different sources and then present it in an acceptable academic form (either as an oral report or written presentation). This means that although students may receive guidance at intervening stages of the work, the opportunity of assessment may be all too limited.

Assessment: for whom?

It is often forgotten that parties other than the student and language teacher may be interested in students' assessment. Who those parties are will vary according to the academic level of the students and the reasons for the course they are taking. At HKU in addition to the student and language teacher one must also include the Language Centre as a teaching and administrative unit, the faculties and future employers. Each has their own specific needs which need to be addressed.

The Student For students, the primary role of assessment is feedback. If students are to make progress, they need extensive comments on both the positive and negative aspects of their work; what they have mastered and what they have failed to master. They also need to know what they could do to improve. This would imply that they do not in fact require a mark or grade, detailed comments should suffice. But students expect a grade. They like to know where they stand in relation to their colleagues and how good their piece of work is in the eyes of the teacher.

The Language Teacher Assessment for the language teacher has a retrospective as well as a prospective function. It allows teachers to reflect on course objectives, the methodologies they have used, and to adapt accordingly. It also allows them to get to know their students -- to find out how much they know and how much they have learned during their course.

The Language Centre As an administrative unit, the Centre has to be in the position to demonstrate the effectiveness of its courses. Recently, the increased funding for English enhancement has added to the burden of accountability. Yet the limited time given over to language study (approximately 60 hours spread over two terms [2]) constrains the form this accountability can take. It would be unrealistic, for example, to try and show a gain in proficiency on an internationally recognised proficiency test. Accountability must in part take the form of subjective opinions collected from the participants in the teaching-learning process, through such means as questionnaires and interviews. However, such qualitative data needs to be supplemented as far as possible by quantitative data. Data of this type also provides invaluable input for the evaluation of courses, therefore monitoring of changes or gains in group performance needs to be built into the system of assessment.

One means used by the Language Centre to show group improvement is that of an oral test, with parallel forms being administered at the beginning and end of the English for Arts Students' course. The test simulates a tutorial (for more details see Morrison & Lee, 1985), assessed on a nine point (criterion-referenced) scale by two raters -- a tutor and a marker whose mark is double-weighted.

For the academic year 1991/92, of the 464 students who took both tests, 316 (68%) improved by at least one band while 114 (24.5%) showed a decrease of one band or more. Taking into account individual variability and notwithstanding the limitations of using bands as absolute marks of equal intervals for demonstrating gain (see Alderson, 1991b), the difference in mean scores was significant at the .001 level. The group as a whole performed better on the post test than the pretest. This may, of course, be a result of a number of factors, including students' familiarity with the test format as well as and with each other, their increased confidence having been at the University for nearly a year, and their general improvement in spoken English. Even though the gain cannot be attributed to any single factor, it is significant and likely at least in part to be due to the teaching of oral skills for tutorials and seminars on the Language Centre course.

Faculty Faculty needs are similar to those of the Language Centre. For the faculties grades are functional. They need to know which students have not satisfied the language requirement and what grade (if any) to put on the transcript. One area of difficulty that arises is that of comparability of grades and marks. Language teachers and subject specialists need to talk the same language in assessment and from the limited work so far undertaken in the area of joint assessment at HKU, it appears that not only do the two parties look for different things (justifiably enough), but that their interpretation of a marking scales may be very different. Much work remains to be done with regard to faculty and language teacher collaboration if students are not to get mixed messages from the different markers where, for example, a B+ for some teachers is 'average' while for others it is 'very good'.

The Employer One of the reasons why the university is taking an ever increasing interest in English is that employers are complaining about the poor communicative ability of graduates. Employers want some quality assurance. However, this is very difficult to give since for logistical reasons English enhancement courses are run during the first year of studies, in most cases two years before the students enter the employment market. Unless an assessment of students' English is undertaken in the final year, the grades given for performance in English may remain of little value, yet this is what the employer will go on. The university is still a long way from redressing this problem, however steps are being taken with the curriculum design to ensure that students are taught and assessed on some of the skills they will need later in life. The course to be piloted by the Language Centre for the Faculty of Engineering is 'English for Professional and Technical Communication' and not one restricted solely to English for Academic Purposes.

What should be Assessed?

Having ascertained that both continuous assessment and tests have a place in the curriculum, it was necessary to review the 'content' of assessment. Traditionally, the Language Centre has restricted continuous assessment to assessing achievement, but has extended testing beyond what has been specifically taught on the English courses to give a measure of proficiency. The end-of-course test for English for Arts Students, for example, is an integrated test of reading. listening and writing, even though the course objectives place much more emphasis on writing than the other two language skills. This could be regarded as unnecessary or even unfair. However, as explained above, an assessment of proficiency is required by some of the parties involved in the assessment and therefore appears to be justified.

Even within the sphere of continuous assessment it is difficult to determine what should be assessed. Unlike most faculty-based courses, English enhancement courses are designed to develop and strengthen skills rather than to teach content, though some content may be included. Metalinguistic and metacognitive skills (abilities to reflect on language and cognition) are among those given high priority. For example, much emphasis is placed on critical questioning in the Academic Communications and Study Skills course for Social Science students. Thus, tasks set for the students try to embody these skills, but such tasks cannot be devoid of content and the unresolved question that remains is whether the content should be 'authentic' in terms of what the students are studying or specific for the English enhancement course. The former increases the face validity of what is being assessed for the students; they can identify with the content. The latter, on the other hand, has the advantage of aligning the English courses more closely to the other courses students are studying in that it gives the English course its own content. It too has face validity but of a different kind; face validity for the faculty rather than for the students.

Another problem that needs further consideration is whether the product, process or effort involved in completing a task should be assessed. If the focus of teaching is on the process and revision of text is seen as a major contributor to the successful completion of a task, is it realistic or even fair to assess only the final product? Furthermore, how does one assess drafts? In real life drafts are often commented on by colleagues or one's boss and revised accordingly, but ultimately it is the final product that counts.

The Question of Authenticity

Authenticity is a key concern not only for continuous assessment but also for tests since it may affect the tasks students are required to complete. Nonetheless, it must be remembered that authenticity extends beyond tasks; texts selected as a basis for task completion may be 'authentic', as may the desired outcome of any given task. Each has to be considered and weighted against such other factors as the time taken for task completion, the costs involved in setting up the tasks as well as the generalizability from one task to another and the reliability of the measure. If, for example, students are required to complete an extended task such as a project which takes a large proportion of one term's teaching, there will be little time for other work.

A project may appear authentic in that it requires of the students a detailed academic investigation involving them in a complete study cycle. However, is this what is actually required of students in their faculties and will this be required of them in the future? It is likely that some of the skills involved in each task are relevant, but the task as a whole may be far from 'authentic' in its narrow sense of mirroring real-life outside the language classroom. (Faculties often require of the students considerably less than the Language Centre in terms of written and oral work, partly because of their belief that students are not able to cope with such high demands.) This does not necessarily invalidate the task. If one accepts that no task for assessment can replicate real-life, but each will have its own authenticity (Alderson, 1981), one needs to look for characteristics that overlap between the two contexts. To use Bachman's (1992) terminology, the tasks will have a varying degree of 'perceived relevance'. One therefore cannot look at tasks as being either authentic or inauthentic: authenticity should be viewed as a continuum.

Constraints of time and quantity of input are, of course, more severe in a test situation than for continuous assessment which in turn may affect task authenticity. This, however, may not be significant provided that there is authenticity of outcome, i.e. what the students have to produce has a high degree of authenticity in relation to the work they are expected to do for the subjects in which they are majoring. In other words, in a testing situation what appears to be important is not that the texts and tasks are highly authentic, but the outcome is, allowing generalizations to be made about students' abilities.

Assessment Criteria

It is not uncommon for assessment criteria to be predetermined for tests and examinations but left to individual teacher's judgements for continuous assessment. The latter may be a source of considerable variability as has been shown in a recent study by Williamson (this volume). The question therefore is whether it would be possible and indeed desirable to establish universal assessment criteria spanning continuous assessment as well as tests. In an ideal world, having one set of criteria that would be acceptable to all the parties interested in student assessment would be advantageous and, indeed, work is being carried out at the Language Centre[3] and elsewhere (see North, 1992) to see if such criteria could be drawn up. However, as has been shown above, the needs and expectations of those involved in assessment are often very different and a number of factors including whether the criteria are to show achievement (for the student) or proficiency (for the future employer) have to be taken into account.

If assessment is to demonstrate achievement, should it be task-based and if so, how should a task be interpreted? A task may be as small as writing an introduction to an essay or as large as writing a project on, for example, the medium of instruction in Hong Kong. These 'tasks' are obviously not comparable and one could differentiate between them by looking on the former as an exercise while the latter as a task. This may solve one problem in that exercises could be used for feedback and not as part of formal assessment. But it does not solve the major problem of whether the product and/or the process of the tasks should be assessed. The larger the task, the more is involved in its completion and the more important is the process of completing it. Deriving criteria for assessing the product would appear a feasible proposition, but using the same for assessing the process may prove problematic or even counterproductive.

An additional source of concern is whether language or skills should be assessed. At the tertiary level where students have already undergone 1,000 - 1,500 hours of English language teaching at school,

the emphasis should be on developing skills and teaching students to use the language they have efficiently. But it is very difficult to predetermine which skills need to be utilised for the completion of a task or how to judge a student who has completed a task successfully, but on calling upon different skills to those being assessed. Furthermore, is it possible to weight these skills in any purposeful way and to what extent can one make generalizations about students' mastery of specific skills on their performance on any one task?

The detail with which the criteria need to be specified may also differ according to the purpose of assessment. As suggested above, for assessing achievement the criteria could be task specific which would be most beneficial for the students but of little value to faculty or future employers. The latter would want specifications they could relate to; they may even want to know where one individual lay not in relation to his/her group but in relation to the whole population. In other words, they may need to know where the student lies on a general proficiency scale such as IELTS. A possible solution that was put forward was to work out a two tier system, the first being a more global one that relates performance to an accepted proficiency scale and the second a more detailed one that relates to achievement. Since all students at HKU have attained a minimum of a grade D in the Use of English examination, the more detailed descriptors would in effect spread the students who would otherwise fall within a rather narrow band on a proficiency scale. However, one must bear in mind that the more detailed the specifications and the finer the distinctions being made, the more difficult the criteria are to apply.

'Alternative Assessment'

One view expressed was that current assessment procedures are seen as threatening. A great deal of emphasis is placed on a number of major assignments and the end-of-course test. Furthermore, there is little flexibility built into the system to allow students to progress at the pace they would feel most comfortable with or to actively participate in setting their own goals. Greater student involvement in assessment would go some way in alleviating pressures hitherto experienced. Students could, for example, be participants in building up their learning profiles with their teachers. They could also set their own agenda for assessment within their teacher's framework. And if they were taught to assess themselves and to take a greater responsibility for their own learning, they would begin to understand the assessment process and would, hopefully, no longer see it as threatening. Assessment would become a motivating factor that could enhance performance.

Conclusion

From the discussions it appears that both testing and continuous assessment have a place in the tertiary curriculum, although more could be done to make both less threatening and more accessible to the students. The Language Centre is moving in this direction: as of September 1992, it is planning to make available test marking criteria to students on two of its major courses to help students set their own learning goals; this is widely seen as a step in the right direction.

As in all assessment situations there are a number of tensions. There is a tension between demonstrating achievement and proficiency; there is also a tension between maintaining high authenticity of assessment procedures and efficiency so that assessment does not consume too much teaching time; and finally, there is the tension between allowing flexibility in the system while maintaining reliability of results. Since it would be impossible to remove these tensions, one needs to be aware of them and to preserve a balance between their conflicting demands.

Reliability of assessment is becoming an increasing concern as the demand for accountability grows. As courses become part of the degree curricula so students' performance needs to be recorded in a meaningful and comprehensible way. There is a growing need for external comparability as well as recognition throughout the University. There is also a need for a system that is fair to students and one that motivates them to do well. There is, in other words, a need for assessment to become an integral part of course development with all parties contributing to it, rather than its design being left to a small group.

Notes

[1] The Language Centre was responsible for the teaching and assessment of English to first year undergraduate students not majoring in English at the time of writing. However, as of 1 July, 1992, this operation has been transferred to a separate unit, the English Centre.

[2] The time allocated to English enhancement courses varies across faculties. The course for the Faculty of Arts is 60 hrs, 12 of which are for self-access work and small group tutorials while the course for students of the Faculty of Engineering is 48 timetabled hours and in addition students are expected to undertake self-access work.

[3] This work was started as an attempt to reach a common understanding about marking criteria among staff of the Language Centre and the Faculty of Social Science. It was initiated by Nigel Bruce who should be contacted for more details on the project.

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Ensuring Access and Quality in Open Learning Programmes: Communication and Study Skills Training for ESL-Medium Higher Education[1]

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Tertiary institutions worldwide are increasingly catering to adult, part-time students who 'missed the boat' to higher education the first time round. This paper addresses the compound problems these students face in attempting to pursue a distance education in a second language, and offers the specific example of Hong Kong and the access and degree programmes offered by the University of Hong Kong's School of Professional and Continuing Education. The paper analyses the types of study and communication problems open learning students may bring with them to their studies, and recommends a policy of communication and study skills training as a means of ensuring both student access to full degree programmes, and the quality of the education offered.

Introduction

There are a number of reasons why societies evolve a Second-language(L2)-medium education system, whether beginning at the primary, secondary or only tertiary level. They may be relics of colonial rule or economic dominance, multilingual or ethnically-diverse countries, like India, Singapore or Nigeria, where national language planning has determined it prudent to adopt a neutral language of international currency. Or they may be countries like the Gulf States or Hong Kong which, with whatever mixed feelings, feel they cannot train an academic community or sustain academic programmes of any international currency using their own language as the learning medium. In addition to the neutral language imperative, reasons for sustaining L2-medium education include: the continuing dependence of the majority of universities in the developing world on English for post-graduate training of their own faculty; the status of English as the international currency 'standard' of western education; and the exponential growth of the knowledge base, rendering uneconomical the duplication of all publications in the languages of every language group. While non-Anglophone developed countries can easily maintain tertiary education in their own language, even they now insist on their students developing at least academic reading competence in English [for a fuller exploration of the phenomenon of ESL-medium education and its implications, see Bruce 1990].

This paper explores the role and provision of language and study skills training in special 'feeder' and diploma programmes offering access to degree programmes. It identifies some of the problems open learners carry with them from their earlier educational experiences, and offers recommendations for the assurance of both accessibility and quality for such programmes in an L2-medium educational context. The type of distance education referred to here is open, adult learning; 'distance' is characterised by lower contact with faculty and other students, by poorer study facilities and pastoral care than that enjoyed by full-time students, and by the critical fact that most students are in full-time employment. In Hong Kong, most students do receive frequent lectures and regular tutorials, so the 'physical' distance is not as great as for students of, for example, the U.K.'s Open University system, with its televised lectures and assignments by correspondence. Lee (1992) discusses the relationship between 'openness' and 'distance' in education, with special reference to the programmes offered by HKU's School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPACE).

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First, a few words about the distinct nature of 2nd-language-medium education and why, in the author's opinion, it appears to have an identity problem. For a long time, the ESL-medium system - in Africa and the Middle East, as well as in Hong Kong - succeeded in educating an elite 'cadre'; now, with the democratisation of education and the greater aspiration to further and higher education, there is pressure for a curriculum and an educational approach less removed from the culture and concerns of the broad community. There is considerable pressure among intellectuals in Hong Kong for the English medium to be abandoned; some educationists cite Canadian evidence of the 'additive' benefits of a bilingual education (each improving performance in the other language) in support of curricular reform as sufficient to provide a worthwhile ESL-medium education for a large proportion of Hong Kong schoolchildren (and Chinese-medium for the rest). What is clear is that, at present, those who 'failed' the first time round still face problems of accessibility to an 'international' higher education, in many cases because of the level of literacy or study skills in the 2nd language required for successful part-time study at that level.

The author's concern with the University's ESL-medium identity has grown out of discussions with colleagues from academic teaching departments during four years at the University of Hong Kong. These discussions have ranged over the issues of students' language needs, the 2nd-language-medium nature of tertiary education in Hong Kong, and the problems many students have in coping with the demands of ESL-medium academic study. They have yielded the kind of collage of views, perspectives and rationales that have made it difficult to assemble a coherent identity of this university as a 2nd-language-medium institution. Compounding the uncertainty over identity has been news of radical educational change taking place in the U.K., with the gradual removal of the distinction between universities and polytechnics, the intensification of the education vs. training debate, and the creation of elite research universities to allow most universities to place greater emphasis on teaching. At the same time, the rise to prominence of the 'educational accountant' has brought 'cost-centering' and the sight of academic disciplines seeking new groupings in which to huddle for safety from the descending rubber chop. All these changes have caused teaching professionals to question a whole range of assumptions about the educational system they work in, and the education they offer their students.

This 'identity problem' has been aggravated by the 2nd-language-medium dimension of the system, and has pervaded Hong Kong tertiary education at a number of levels, through the educational missions of institutions, the curricular aims of disciplinary degree programmes and departmental teaching approaches, down to the teaching units directly charged with tackling academic communication. In this paper, I explore the implications of the 2nd-language-medium dimension of education in Hong Kong for Access programmes by characterising the kinds of learning difficulties language teaching staff have encountered in one particular ESL-medium tertiary institution, through involvement both with full-time Social Sciences and Arts Faculty undergraduates and with adult open learning students on the London University external diploma in Economics. I then make recommendations:

i) for ensuring and maintaining what Squires (1990, p.32) calls 'real accessibility' to ESL-medium adult open learning students, and quality of those access and degree programmes;

ii) on the kinds of learning aims and objectives we have set for the study and communication skill courses we provide here on the Diploma in Economics programme, and would recommend for other L2-medium Access courses;

iii) on the kinds of educational and learning approaches which have proved difficult to implement here in Hong Kong, but which, it is argued, are suitable not only for study and communication skills programmes, but also for academic subject teaching, at both access and degree levels.

While most of the comments below apply specifically to the Hong Kong context, they are offered for consideration of their applicability to other L2-medium educational environments.

Problems Facing Open Access Students: Learning and Communication

The last decade has seen an expanding range of open learning options being offered worldwide,

and certainly in Hong Kong. As Squires (1990, p.32) says "there are more second routes and second chances, and fewer dead-ends and irreversible choices than in the past". Figures at Hong Kong University's School of Professional & Continuing Education clearly show the upsurge in demand for higher education among the working population, a measure of the desire for personal development and advancement (Holford, 1992, p.17). The School also has figures to show the extent to which applicants' linguistic competence - their competence in English, the medium of the bulk of international distance education programmes - impedes their access to that education.

The weaker the English competence of ESL students, the greater the problem of access to information. Processing information becomes problematic both in terms of the quantity of information students can deal with - the reading load can be intimidating - and in terms of quality, identifying the conceptual structure of an extended text or the author's arguments and attitudes or positions. In our experience, students often fail to appreciate important rhetorical dimensions of texts, where authors dismiss or lend authority to other writers' work. They also have problems with the use of expressions of modality to distance the writer from (or associate him/her with) others' or their own findings, implications or conclusions. These are not overly-sophisticated reading skills; they are fundamental to academic communication, at least according to the standards set by the U.K.-based degree-awarding bodies represented in Hong Kong. The author coordinates and teaches a course in language & study skills for Sociology on the University of London's diploma access programme to the full B.Econ. degree programme. London's Board of Examiners has issued clear directives that mere descriptive regurgitation of set texts is not what is being sought; it is not part of the educational aims and objectives even of the access diploma syllabus.

If these are the kinds of problem experienced by A-level matriculants who have gained entry to Hong Kong's premier tertiary institution, the implications for open access are obvious. We must, however, be wary of ascribing rhetorical problems uniquely to linguistic shortcomings in individual students. Before looking at these communicative problems in detail, we should briefly consider the kinds of educational context from which many Access students have emerged, and the kind of English-medium system which complicates the provision of access programmes in ESL-medium systems like Hong Kong.

Background problems: Previous learning experiences

A majority of students attempting to pursue open learning programmes, it may be assumed, were unable to derive the full benefit of their adolescent experience of formal education. In some cases, a non-literate home environment may have offered scant preparation for an 'abstract' academic curriculum, possibly retarding the development of the kinds of abstract reasoning abilities that make it easier to respond positively to such a curriculum. Access to higher education continues to be determined by success in the theoretical rather than practical pursuit of knowledge and understanding. Winch (1990) writes:

> "There are no easy or glib ways of getting around what is a major paradox of mass education - namely, that it is a preparation for life that divorces itself from life in order to be an efficient preparation for it" (p.105).

In Hong Kong, the use of English as the learning medium in most schools has served to accentuate the remoteness of education from everyday life, and the rather theoretical way English has been taught - dissociated from the rest of the curriculum - has tended to alienate a large number of students. Teaching practice is only now slowly coming to reflect the fact that the rest of the school curriculum is also conducted in English, and that it is a language which needs to be put to practical use as a learning medium. For too long English teaching in schools has been defined in terms of complexity of lexis and syntax, with some branching beyond the sentence to take account of 'cohesion' between propositions. In mitigation, this conformity to a traditional teaching approach owes much to the fact that the vast majority of secondary school teachers of English are non-native speakers, whose own training in English would have been highly traditional. Their continuance of conservative traditions is encouraged by the administrative structure within which they work. Schools work to a uniform curriculum, with a single exam board and a Department of Education and Manpower struggling to ensure minimum standards of teaching competence.

There is, therefore, an understandable tendency to regard the rhetorical dimension of expression as non-linguistic, and not properly within the brief of the 'English teacher'. There is also a discomfort with this level of expression; most Hong Kong secondary teachers' L1 has never been used for the kinds of academic transaction that constituted their own higher education, and they were never asked or required to reflect on the way in which the English language was being used. When one considers that many English teachers are not even products of a tertiary English education or training, it is not surprising that they revert to the type of English teaching they were last in contact with - their own. It is of no surprise then when tertiary tutors, rather than requiring evidence of any argumentative or expository skills, are forced to be satisfied with 'approximate' evidence of student understanding, token and often discrete 'points' which imply an argument but fall short of delivering it.

Problems of academic communication: Strategies and Skills

Each of the following 'shortcomings' are treated briefly; suggestions as to how they can be tackled in the curriculum are holistic, and are offered later. It is important that these deficiencies be seen as treatable and not as nebulous gripes or apologies for the 'innate' indolence or incompetence of our students. Based on experience with full-time and open learning students at HKU then, it would seem that many students leave Hong Kong secondary school with a language competence and study strategy profile featuring a number of the following characteristics:

Reading 'through a microscope': Students often exhibit a 'locally-focused' reading technique, reading line by line and often selecting information out of context. On the evidence of 1st-year students at the University, skimming for gist and scanning for specific information do not seem to have been perceived in the secondary school as strategies which 'pay off'; they do not seem to feature on the short list of skills seen to be crucially formative of the intellect or an ability to pursue higher study. Adult learners and undergraduates alike tend to quote out of context, demonstrating incompetence even below the level of the sentence, even when attempting to quote or copy from a source text.

Linear approach to text: Students often seem unaware of the rhetorical strategies writers or speakers employ beyond the level of the sentence. Texts tend to be approached as an unfolding series of declarative statements, rather than as the final implementation of a design, filled out linguistically from a 'master' conceptual and rhetorical design. Students characteristically do not bring with them a 'top-down' approach to reading at an academic level, and lack understanding of conventional patterns of academic discourse or genres, or of how an argument or exposition (e.g. by classification, comparison, etc.) is typically structured. This is inevitably reflected in student writing, and is particularly noticeable in student responses to essay questions, where there is often insufficient reflection on the implications of the question, or how the question setter might be asking for a specific slant on the subject in question.

Surface approach to text: Students exhibit a preoccupation with the declarative quality of statements in texts, even in response to questions about a writer's attitude and stance. There follows a consequent inability to paraphrase precisely a writer's stance on an issue; 'X says that..' is more likely than 'X denies/criticises/ suggests that...'. Most students do not seem to have been encouraged at school to engage in interpretation or argumentation, and few open learning students show evidence of having been encouraged to develop these skills in the workplace. Most students do not give the impression that they are aware that detailed information is generally used in communication only to serve higher rhetorical goals (e.g. to support or illustrate an assertion or argument).

Problems with abstract language: Students are often unable to paraphrase with the use of abstract terminology, or to integrate such terminology into their discourse. Terms which will succinctly paraphrase an idea or proposition tend not to be used, despite their being part of the students' vocabulary, e.g. 'X dismisses Y's theory'. One notices this shortcoming most glaringly in students' introductions (and conclusions) to essay questions, where this type of paraphrase and summary are useful , if not essential, in any reply which eases the reader, smoothly but succinctly, towards the writer's position or argument.

A 'product' approach to writing: A handicap which is not restricted to Hong Kong - or even to a L2-medium educational system - is the notion that the act of writing is a once-and-for-all commitment

via a linear outpouring of ideas, crystallised on paper. There is something unreflective about the assembly of ideas in many first essays at the tertiary level in H.K., though this may say more about the attitude towards writing inculcated at school than about the capability of the student to produce a more reasoned and rhetorically sophisticated piece of communication. Teachers at secondary school could perhaps usefully reflect on the dictum attributed to E.M.Forster: "How do I know what I think until I see what I say?". The very process of articulation can lead to the discovery of new insights and ideas; students should be encouraged to write drafts of essays and reports, and teachers should be willing to offer constructive comments on them. For various reasons, this is not done - students are reluctant to do it, and teachers seem reluctant to require it of them, especially at tertiary level, where the workload implications are often strong deterrents. Many teachers regard the written submission purely as an object for judgement, the crystallisation of what the student 'knows'.

Plagiarism: Anathema to most teachers, 'plagiarism' generally masks a number of sins of the system, notably encouragement of the 'guru' fallacy. Students generally place great reliance on the words of an acknowledged authority on a subject - typically, their lecturers and the authors of the designated 'key' textbooks. They do this for good reason; the whole upper secondary training is geared to memorising the words of experts for exam regurgitation. Students, whether full-time or adult open learners, approach tertiary study with the idea that, as a demonstration of 'learning', university tutors simply want their own, or their sources', words returned to them as faithfully as possible. It would seem that the root of the plagiarism 'syndrome' lies in the discrepancy between the standard of English which the students feel they should emulate, and their own perceived standard of English, which they feel to be inadequate to the task of paraphrasing what these expert writers have said.

This last 'problem area' encapsulates the problems of the ESL-medium system. Students rightly feel resentful at the idea that dishonesty lies at the root of their plagiarism. With so much to learn - in a 2nd language - little energy is left over to spend on crafting an original yet sufficiently sophisticated stylistic display of prowess in English. For students to be convinced that this expenditure of energy is worthwhile and even essential to advancing their intellectual development, requires a switch of emphasis away from the thoughts of the experts to the interpretations and opinions of the students themselves. This requires more than lip service; it needs an emphasis on the arts of reasoning and persuasion, if students are to be guided as well as encouraged towards the articulation of their own ideas and arguments.

Teachers in adult education programmes have a responsibility to empower students to realise their learning potential, and to discover their critical voice. Perhaps epitomising L2-medium tertiary institutions' identity problem are those external examiners' reports, which reveal a simultaneous concern with and acquiescence in the L2 student penchant for merely giving evidence of declarative knowledge, at the expense of rhetorical effectiveness or any evidence of a broad reading base. ESL-medium tertiary institutions have to face the problem that, even with access study and communication skills programmes, they will have difficulty maintaining the international 'currency' of their degrees if there is not a change in the whole curriculum, in the way learning is organised, and in the expectations of tutors and examiners. In Hong Kong, the tolerance of prospective employers is already being tested, with comments from the Engineering, Law and Business communities suggesting a perceived decline in graduates' ability to communicate or to apply their 'knowledge' - and these are criticisms of graduates from full-time programmes.

Ensuring and Maintaining Access to Higher Education in an ESL-medium System

Educational planners, whether in a government education ministry or a school or university, need to consider the full implications of adopting a second language as the educational medium - at whatever level. If that system is English-medium - as it is for all the participants here - then English is not simply another subject in the curriculum. It is the medium through which the rest of the curriculum passes; knowledge is inert without the ability or means to communicate it. In open learning, it is vital to consider the implications of the bilateral nature of academic communication, and its critical role in providing access, not only to formal education itself, but to information at any level.

Maintaining access: feeder and certificate/diploma courses

With access programmes in ESL-medium education, it is clear that the language problem presents open learning institutions with two clear choices: either screen or enable. One can either require a minimum level of English proficiency for access to a programme - even an Access programme - or one can set about enabling students to gain such access, by developing purpose-built academic study and communication skills (ACSS) courses. In the kind of EFL environment that Hong Kong presents, I would recommend at least 2 tiers of access ACSS programmes:

1) a preliminary intensive 'feeder' course which, while heavy on the mechanics of the language, takes a functional approach, emphasising the particular situations and speech functions for which certain structures, expressions and registers are useful in basic academic communication.

2) an in-sessional academic communication and study skill course geared very much to specific academic courses. The School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPACE) has consistently supported this kind of programme in running the London University external diploma in Economics programme - indeed London warmly supported the idea. There is no formal recognition of work done on this course, largely because the linguistic profiles of the student populations at the various distance centres vary so much.

I am not aware of any moves elsewhere to build formal ACSS-type components to Access or degree programmes, but news of any such developments would be welcome. Experience at the university of Hong Kong has shown that where ACSS-type courses are given 'credit-worthiness' or the equivalent, student interest, motivation, commitment and consequently workrate increases dramatically. It is one thing to argue that students will respond to material that has intrinsic quality, but open learning students are under too much pressure not to give priority to work that they are obliged to complete. What is clear is that any Access ACSS course centred around the skills of 'reading and writing', or on 'English grammar', would betray an institutional belief in a remedial role for English language teaching and the effectiveness of a retrospective and retroactive remedial approach to the problem of providing wider access to ESL-medium higher education.

To be avoided, above all, is a situation where policy or resourcing constraints oblige open learning programme administrators to reject outright applicants for higher level programmes on the grounds of their irremediable 'linguistic' shortcomings.

Maintaining quality: the degree programme

If the access courses have been effective in facilitating access to academic information and argumentation, the only communication skills training component necessary for incorporation into a full degree programme should be at the productive, articulatory end of the spectrum, with language experts advising on oral presentation or written papers. If one is aiming at lifelong enablement, I would recommend taking a further step, by broadening the curriculum to accommodate the study of communication itself as an object of intellectual enquiry.

Such moves are afoot in the full-time undergraduate curriculum at HKU, where attempts are being made to give greater intellectual substance to 1st-year academic communication and study skill (ACSS-type) courses, on the basis that true communicative empowerment involves the ability to question the very pedagogy and the very system of communication through which academic 'power' is exercised[2]. This development has run parallel with a move towards promoting learner independence and confidence, and in general maximising the use of teacher and student time, through a more flexible curriculum and the development of more self-access, individualised options. Further, there has been a realisation that academic communication can only be improved in a fully academic context, when the language is put to academic use at a level comparable and contributing to the rest of the curriculum; applied linguistic expertise now ranges beyond the description of linguistic systems to exploring the role of language as a social semiotic, and as a vital tool of negotiation, transaction and general persuasion - everything that used to hold a central place in the tertiary curriculum as 'Rhetoric'. In an L2-medium system, the applied linguist can play a key role in empowering students, not only to understand better how and why language

is used in the academic community, but to be able to discuss that use, to take a more critical view of text, and to develop powers of argumentation that they might have thought were the province of the expert.

Tackling Learning and Communication Skills Together: Recommendations

Aims and Objectives for Access (& other) Open Learning Programmes

The overall aim of an ACSS-type Access course should be to improve the ability of students to meet the communicative demands of English-medium academic study, a direction in which ACSS courses for full-time students are increasingly moving. Such ACSS courses would aim at developing students':

1) attitude to study and communication: valuing the study process as much as the submitted product, collaboration as much as competition, questions as much as answers;

2) confidence in offering their own opinions, interpretations, speculations, etc., in writing or when engaging in seminar exchanges;

3) preparedness for independent academic study: use of library, dictionaries, reference books, and seeking meaning, definitions, clarifications and further related publications;

4) awareness of what is expected of them in academic communication (especially assignment questions) and of how language is used in the academic sphere;

5) ability to handle extensive reading assignments and lectures, and to perceive how they are structured, through 'advance organisers', indicators of change of main topic or aspect, for example;

Students at HKU face a colossal amount of information input effectively "embedded" in a second/foreign language, English. One of our aims in the ACSS programmes, is to place the focus primarily on the ideas running through the text, and on the students engaging in the process of getting that information out of the text. Consequently, there is a strong emphasis on how writers structure their ideas, and the rhetorical techniques they use in exposition, argument, etc. The materials highlight relevant rhetorical and structural devices and patterns, and offer practice in recognising and then producing these in appropriate academic contexts and tasks.

Given the resourcing constraints, and the need to cultivate in students an independent, discovery- and process-oriented approach to their studies, the course concentrates on a 'study cycle', geared essentially to the development of confidence and effective strategies in those skills of academic reading and writing, which are so important to successful 'open' part-time study. To cope specifically with these academic communicative demands, students are trained in the following skills, listed as they feature in the 'study cycle':

a) access and abstract information from academic texts, lectures and seminars in English

b) further analyse, evaluate and interpret these inputs for their underlying conceptual content,and for authorial stance

c) synthesise information from sources and organise it so as to highlight the patterns and overall direction of the argument/thesis

d) articulate clearly in English a range of academic response types (summary, evaluation, application, etc.), both oral and written

This kind of course design reflects a learner-centred approach, but still falls short of empowering students to express themselves as academic 'equals'. This is ultimately where open learning should lead, preparing students for lifelong participation in an enquiring, intellectual (if not 'academic') community. It is to this end that the ACSS programme for full-time Social Science students has begun to pursue a

curricular approach aimed at developing students as fellow investigators of knowledge, with the emphasis on 'enquiry' rather than 'study'. Real academic enquiry is not about textbooks or lectures, but about pursuing problems, explanations and resolutions. In this ACSS course, Social Science students are encouraged to go beyond the more theoretical textbook and lecture input, to formulate hypotheses for testing received or contentious views or assumptions 'on the ground', through questionnaire surveys and the examination of studies conducted in Hong Kong itself. With this approach, students engage directly with an intellectually-challenging issue, and make a personal (and collective) investment in the investigative process and in its outcomes. This combined study and investigative approach builds student confidence, by ensuring familiarity with key terminology and concepts, so essential to diminishing the 'opacity' of texts and giving students freer rein to their ideas.

It also offers them opportunities to engage in purposeful academic interaction: debate, discussion, negotiation and oral presentation.

Tertiary-level open learning should be able to move in this direction, and some programmes are being directed with the necessary imagination and sophisticated sense of educational aims and motivations. Most external ESL-medium open learning programmes, however, are still at the stage of taking on board the role of an ACSS course, aimed simply at developing communicative and study skills at a higher level of sophistication than the students have previously experienced. It will be some time before we can hope for an integration of approach across the curriculum. Not least among the reasons for this is the great disparity of proficiency among those seeking access to these programmes. At present, ESL-medium open learning programmes need to develop strategies for identifying the different levels of student language need, and for organising a coherent structure for provision.

Teaching Approaches for ACSS-type Open Learning Programmes

It is not enough to propose aims and objectives for developing academic communication and study skills, and to have a sound pedagogical theory. It is also important to manage student learning efficiently - especially in the spartan supervision conditions prevailing in open learning programmes. I would offer as a prescription, where circumstances and resources allow, the same teaching approach advised for the study skills and communication access courses in the University's English Centre.

a) Seminar-type group discussions, offering an informal yet authentic forum in which to practise their productive skills; students are actually advised to form close study groups of three or four, which can continue mutual study support beyond the ACSS classroom.

b) Debates and oral presentations, again, developing seminar skills, but being conscious of the need to develop students' confidence in their own oral performance.

c) Small-group investigative projects, at strategic points in the course, involving students in primary and secondary research and work in a more independent but collaborative mode. Subject tutors could participate in the evaluation of the project, working out performance objectives along with their language specialist counterparts. Many of the course objectives could be pursued within the structure of well-managed research projects.

d) Self-access and self-directed 'individualised' learning: this area needs a great deal of support. Audio-visual and computer-assisted self-learning packages need to be made available to students in such a way as to complement structured programmes. Students need, above all, access to word processors as they should be encouraged to develop a process approach to writing, and a systematic and economical approach to the storage and up-dating of their notes. English-enhancement staff can collaborate with their subject discipline counterparts to build up a bank of self-access materials tailored to cater for the full range of students' specific skill and subject-related needs, and to allow for supplementary 'customised' remedial language work.

Above all, such a course should adopt an approach which de-mystifies academic study. Faculty tutors can play an important role in helping students adjust to English-medium study, notably by adopting

a more formative approach to the evaluation of student writing, e.g. by soliciting first drafts for comment on both content and argumentation, and then asking for revisions to be submitted along with the reviewed first draft.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to sketch out the potential role and character of an effective and programme-wide approach to 2nd-language-medium tertiary education, whether at feeder, Access, or degree programme level. I have described what I feel are optimal aims and approaches of academic communication and study skill courses in the ESL-medium distance-learning context, but above all I have tried to draw attention to the importance of being very clear about the distinctive character of 2nd-language as opposed to 1st-language-medium open education.

Notes

[1]This is a revised version of a paper given at the International Conference on Continuing Higher Education in Hong Kong, Jan. 6-8, 1992, at The University of Hong Kong.

[2]This is assuming that there is no contradiction between empowering with access to higher status and income - a strong marketing pull in Hong Kong - and empowering with the development of a 'critical consciousness' (Freire, 1973). For more on empowerment in education, see Simon (1987).

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Reports

An Introduction

to the Action Research Progress Reports

Denis Williamson and Elaine Martyn

An Action Research group was formed in the Language Centre of HKU in October 1991. Those of us who have become involved in it have no doubt done so for different reasons (perhaps one being to find out what action research really is) but most of us now realize that A.R. is an accessible form of research whereby we can investigate ourselves and the work we do. A better understanding of these two variables can, in turn, lead to changes in practice which improve both teacher and teaching. In action research teachers are the researchers and the researched, and the results they obtain are, therefore, not only of direct relevance, but also of great use to them.

This introduction is no more than an overview of how we are carrying out action research; our methodologies, our findings and our aspirations, because we feel it would be somewhat presumptuous of us, at this relatively early stage in our existence, to try to state in a prescriptive way what action research should or should not be. Although there is perhaps only one fundamental of the standard A.R. model :

- that in order to gain insight into a process one must intervene in that process, cause a change to it and observe the outcomes of this change,

we already see that strict adherence to any one set of strategies of how to put this fundamental into practice may sometimes prove restrictive.

As a general rule here, an action research project has come to represent an opportunity for a group of teachers to investigate certain aspects of what happens in our Language Centre. Should these investigations lead to a perceived improvement, then recommendations could be made to the Language Centre because each A.R. team sees itself as representative of the whole Centre. One reason we are working at the group level is to accomplish this, yet we do realize that many other action researchers may choose to work as individuals.

Our action research cycle begins with an awareness that there is an area or activity within our own work which is causing some concern. It proceeds through stages of fact-finding, reflection on possible courses of action, action, observation, further reflection and further action, as necessary. The overall objective is to understand each situation well enough to find a way to improve it and to relieve the concern that was originally felt.

The apparent "common sense" approach of action research should not mask the fact that there needs to be a great deal of rigour in the observations made, and whilst we do aspire to come up with recommendations for our own Language Centre, there should be no attempt to represent our findings as anything more than they are; expressions of what we are discovering about ourselves.

Should the more learned reader, therefore, be tempted to dismiss any of our findings as somewhat less than enlightening, then please remember that we are doing this research primarily to inform ourselves. It is one thing to know of and to favour certain categories of theory and approach, but it is sometimes quite a surprise to find out which category you actually operate in. Hopefully, therefore, the reader will have some food for thought in the findings of our projects, although if not, then perhaps some does exist in the manner in which we reached these findings.

One highly significant outcome of action research in HKU Language Centre is that it has got a lot of people actively investigating their own academic pursuits, with a view to understanding them better and improving them.

Perhaps Action Research can do the same for you, too?

The progress reports that follow describe two of the A.R. projects currently under way in the department, and as such highlight areas that teachers here are concerned about.

A very short reading list for those who might want to know more about action research.

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1. Kember, D. and Kelly, M. (1991). Using Action Research to Improve Teaching Hong Kong. ETU of HKP & ETC of CPHK. (Use also for further bibliographies)

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Self-Access Action Research: A Progress Report

Elaine Martyn and Chan Nim Yin

Self-Access Action Research Group: Chan Nim Yin, Chris Copland, Elaine Martyn, Annie Mueller, Liz Nakhoul, Liz Samson, and Anne Storey

Background of Self-Access in the Language Centre

Key events from the history of self-access (SA) in the Language Centre set the stage for current developments. The first tentative steps towards SA occurred about twenty years ago in the early 1970s: students were given SA to tapes in the language laboratory which they could use in any free booths while regular classes proceeded simultaneously. A few years later, a separate Practice Laboratory was set up solely for SA purposes. The next ten years saw teachers using the Practice Laboratory in a variety of ways ranging from free non-directed open access to very guided use, or simply as a place to complete specific assignments for courses.

The peripheral role of SA learning in the Practice Laboratory ended in September, 1991, when it became a required course component for two major first year courses at the Language Centre, English for Arts Students (EAS) and Academic Communication and Study Skills (ACSS) for social sciences students. This new curriculum requirement stimulated a great deal of interest and concern not only because of the number of students enrolled in these courses (EAS: 480; ACSS: 330) and teachers involved (100% of the English section--between the two courses), but also because of the relatively high proportion of time devoted to SA (one-third of the 60 course hours).

Two additional factors which played a role in the developing interest in self access at the Language Centre were the recent approval of the English Language Resource Centre proposal for an additional SA facility and the significant number of teachers who were new to the institution and unfamiliar with the existing resources (one third of those who taught these courses during the first semester).

To meet the new course requirements, a great deal of work had gone into the development of new materials for SA in the Practice Laboratory and in introductory materials within the courses. Nonetheless the new curriculum component, new materials, new teachers, and limited experience in SA teaching and learning resulted in almost as much concern as enthusiasm as the term progressed.

This concern led to the formation of the SAAR group. Many questions were asked and problems identified, but there were no easy answers or ready-made solutions. However, the action research model of reflection, planning, action, and observation offered an approach for systematic implementation and study of innovations in response to the perceived difficulties.

Reflection

November 1991 saw the first meeting of colleagues concerned about the under-utilisation of SA resources; within a few meetings, the group had consolidated to seven members and had decided to focus on learner training--not materials, as this was being addressed by other Language Centre working groups. We believed that the success of SA hinged as much on learner training as on materials, so were convinced that to make the whole SA concept work, we would need to work on human resources and implementation strategies.

Yet, before we proceeded to plan our action strategies, we wanted to cross-check our concerns and interests with our colleagues, students, and published materials on SA. Thus, as part of our reflection we: (a) conducted a survey to determine English Language Centre teachers' views of SA; (b)

examined the results of the student course evaluations to determine students' views of SA, and (c) read literature on SA and related topics as an on-going part of the project.

Teacher Survey

In December, 1991, 24 colleagues took part in the survey (either by completing a questionnaire or discussing the questionnaire with one of the SAAR group members in an interview). Its aim was to identify teachers' perceptions of their initial and developing views on SA over the semester as well as to record their perceptions of students' views.

On the questionnaire, staff were classified into *old* (having taught courses at the Language Centre) and *new* (first semester at the Language Centre), *experienced* and *not experienced* with SA--as we thought these factors might have influenced their attitudes. The distinction between experienced and not experienced with SA was intentionally left as a forced choice for self-judgement.

The data were collated and independently content analyzed and then cross-checked, a procedure which involved all members of the group. A high level of agreement on the analysis was found, with any discrepancies rechecked by referring back to the original questionnaires. The survey findings and analysis for each question are presented below.

Question 1. How did you feel regarding self-access at the beginning of this term? Why?

More that two-thirds of the respondents (18) said that they felt positive about SA; however, the strength of conviction ranged from very enthusiastic to cautious. The reasons given for such responses were equally varied. For example, while some thought SA was a good idea conceptually and theoretically, others emphasized the benefits of greater exposure and developing learner independence. Of the remaining six respondents, four had very mixed feelings, displaying uncertainty and uneasiness, while two were clearly negative. They used the descriptors "sceptical" and "dubious" about SA. Both questioned whether the students were mature and independent enough to handle SA.

Generally, even among those who initially favoured SA, there was a tendency to qualify their positive responses by giving reasons for concern, worry and doubt. Quite a number of these reasons were related to practical problems such as not knowing what there was in the Practice Laboratory, and awareness that there might be insufficient materials for the students. Others also worried about such considerations as whether sufficient training and guidance could be given to the students.

Question 1 was further analysed by the staff groupings based on experience at the Language Centre and experience with SA to see if there were any significant differences in attitudes. New staff exhibited a more positive overall attitude to the use of SA than old at the beginning of the semester (88% versus 69%). New staff indicated a positive view especially in terms of developing learner independence and of meeting individual needs. Of the old staff, two were negative, three expressed mixed views, and amongst those classified as positive, two were clearly cautious in their statements. Similarly, those who had more experience with self-access also tended to be more cautious than those less experienced in expressing positive views of SA. However, only a third of those who described themselves as not experienced with SA expressed a positive attitude to it.

Question 2. How did you feel about the allocation of one out of three teaching hours per week to self-access?

The number of respondents who found the proportion of time allocated to SA to be relatively high was roughly the same as those who found the schedule appropriate. Nine respondents felt that one in three hours of SA was too high as this would lead to reduced contact hours, and reduced class time for systematic teaching. Eight found the allocation was good, with four mentioning that the SA hour would also provide quality time for tutorials. The others were less certain and worried about how the SA hour would be spent and monitored.

Question 3. What strategies and feedback mechanisms did you use to support the use of self-access?

Generally, there appeared to be an ad hoc approach to SA during the first semester. While some teachers chose one type of strategy or used one kind of feedback mechanism, others opted for multiple strategies for support. Furthermore, while some were more creative and interventionist in their approach, others were less so. The researchers were quite impressed with one strategy which involved creating a handout that gave specific instructions including aims, preparation, and procedure. Others, generally followed the procedures suggested in the introductory units of the two courses in which SA had become a major course component (one third of the assigned class hours). The units suggest an initial identification of needs and wants by the students, a tutorial with the teacher to guide the students in selection of materials, the completion of a "contract" form, and then two additional tutorials during the semester at which students were to report back to the tutorial group and their teacher on their work. Two teachers admitted to having done nothing. One of their answers was, "I rapidly saw that it was not working and moved towards more directed work."

Although there was no direct indication of how effective the various strategies and feedback mechanisms were; it generally appeared from the responses that more teacher involvement and intervention made a difference in the whole process. In particular, it seemed that with clearer expectations from the teacher, students were more willing to make an effort. This preliminary observation became a key idea in our learner training project--it was tested through our action and observation strategies.

Question 4 Now, how do you feel regarding self-access within your courses?

Responses to this question are presented in comparison with attitudes expressed at the beginning of the semester, because it was found that almost all teachers responded in this way rather than by giving a direct statement of their feelings at the time of the survey in December, 1991. The comparison revealed a convergence of views, with the majority of those initially voicing positive views (10/18) *falling*, that is, expressing less positive views, and the majority of those with negative (2/2) or mixed views (2/4) becoming more positive or *rising* in their attitudes. The falling attitudes to SA, however, still remained on the positive side overall; just more cautious in wording, recognizing more practical difficulties than identified at the beginning of the semester.

Question 5. What are your perceptions of student views about self-access?

Almost half of the teachers offered mixed views in their perceptions of students' attitudes to SA; these teachers indicated that while students seemed to approve in principle, they lacked motivation in SA work. The responses of 9 out of the 23 teachers were generally positive . In the teachers' view, students tended to favour SA because of the freedom of choice, with the main drawback being limited resources. Lack of time was also pointed to as a big problem. Three teachers reported a generally negative reaction. Lack of time, boring materials and unwillingness to do extra work outside of that assigned were cited as reasons for this.

To sum up, this survey raised a number of fundamental issues, both theoretical and more practical in nature. Some teachers questioned whether the Language Centre was justified in placing such an emphasis on SA learning. Others wondered about the degree of influence of personal preferences and culture on SA work. Student motivation was also a concern. At the level of implementation, there were doubts regarding the availability, quality and quantity of SA resources. It was also suggested that SA need not be limited to the Practice Laboratory.

The survey clearly confirmed for the SAAR group that the implementation of SA as a required course component in EAS and ACSS had raised many questions and concerns, if not dissension amongst Language Centre English teachers. The results also pointed to the need to develop more effective implementation strategies to maximize the potential benefits of SA.

Summary of Students' Evaluation of Self-Access

Having examined SA from the teachers' perspective in the above section, the following focuses on the reactions of students. In our reflection, we were concerned with questions such as these: How receptive were the students to this new learning concept? How enthusiastic had they been? How much time had they spent in the Practice Laboratory? And, from the teacher's perspective, how accurate had we been in reflecting their attitudes?

A comparison of the collated results from the end-of-semester course evaluations for the two major Language Centre courses for Arts (EAS) and Social Sciences (ACSS), proved interesting, although, strictly speaking, the two evaluation questionnaires could not be directly compared because of their somewhat different wording of questions.

Student Attitudes From the responses given in Table 1, to the EAS questionnaire and in Table 2 to the ACSS questionnaire, it appears that students on the whole were fairly positive and receptive towards SA at the end of the first term. More students on the EAS course thought that SA was a good idea than not; ACSS students gave many more reasons in reporting that they benefitted from SA. Overall, EAS students seemed to be more receptive to the idea of SA. This impression, however, might not be entirely correct due to the way the questions were worded. For example, interpretation of the responses is dependent on the meaning assigned to such value-laden concepts as "a good idea" and "benefitted a little" and the effects of a forced "yes/no" choice.

Table 1

EAS Course Evaluation Results

Is self-access work in the Practice Lab a good idea? Why?

A Good Idea?	No. of Responses	Reasons
Yes	324	Interesting, motivating Well-equipped lab Flexibility of time convenient Freedom of choice, can concentrate on own need Take initiative, test own ability, self-discipline Learn English with pressure Leave teacher free to concentrate on essentials
No	41	No time to go Not enough places Boring alone in Practice Lab Can't understand cassettes and videos Don't know where to start

Note. From the collated results of EAS Course Evaluations, December, 1991.

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1. We would conduct our action research on a single course to maintain some degree of uniformity of participants. EAS was chosen since we all taught this course and both our experience and the results of the teacher and student questionnaires suggested that students in this course were the most amenable to SA.

2. We would implement individual action plans based on specific objectives within our overall objective, which would allow a variety of approaches to be implemented and evaluated. A standard action plan form was to be completed by each group member to assist in the clarification and recording of details.

3. We would monitor the effects of the changes introduced using a common recording tool, as well as individual monitoring techniques appropriate to each action plan.

4. We would meet regularly over the semester as an action research team to share experiences and insights as we progressed.

Action

The SAAR Action Plan form required group members to specify their first semester approaches to SA, specific objectives, actions to be taken, and observation or monitoring techniques to be used. During Semester 1 all had followed the guidelines in the SA unit of EAS--with an orientation to the Practice Laboratory, use of the contract, and three tutorials for feedback during the semester. Some supplemented these by introducing materials in class, asking for learning plans, or receiving extended written comments from students as the semester progressed. SAAR members then specified their Semester 2 plans, as briefly summarized below.

Individual Action Plans

In terms of specific objectives, we moved towards a clearer definition of expectations of learners, more careful monitoring of student SA work, and building of a closer relationship between teachers and students. SAAR group members framed specific objectives and methods of implementation as summarised below.

1. To offer an opportunity for SA writing, a letter exchange between the teacher and each student was arranged.

2. To identify and compare listening strategies of good and poor language learners, a questionnaire was completed by students asking them to identify the strategies they used.

3. To combat the isolation of SA work, peer and group activities were arranged with students for work within and outside of the Practice Laboratory.

4. To develop metacognitive skills in managing SA learning, learners' attention was focused on setting objectives, planning a learning programme, and self-assessment through tutorials and written record-keeping.

5. To identify students' preferred degree of teacher control, students were offered choices and completed questionnaires on their preferences.

6. To raise awareness of SA resources and provide specific individualised guidance on pronunciation, SA resources were used in class and students were directed to suitable follow-up activities.

7. To increase teacher monitoring of SA activities, students were required to record and comment on SA activities on record sheets or in a log.

Observation

The observation stage occurred simultaneously with the action stage, but required careful analysis during the following reflection period. At this stage, it was found that the common recording device was not appropriate to all action plans, so its application was limited. Those who used it were able to record SA tutorial activities and ratings of students' task completion, motivation, and awareness of learning. However, a variety of monitoring techniques were used, either individually or in combination: student logs or record sheets, teacher file cards on individual students' SA work, student questionnaires, teacher logs, and tape recordings.

Group observations

A number of observations were agreed upon by the whole SAAR group.

1. A clearer statement of expectations by the teacher leads to an increase in time spent on SA activities.

2. Increased monitoring keeps students more focused on their tasks, increasing both the time spent on SA activities and possibly their effectiveness.

3. Both written and face-to-face feedback to students are effective motivators.

4. One semester, particularly the second, when demands of other courses and examinations are high, was insufficient to fully realize the benefits of changes implemented.

Individual observations

Observations related to specific action plans were also noted by individual group members.

1. Students responded positively to the letter exchange, but most did not address the questions or comments in the teacher's replies, resulting in rather disjointed pieces of personal writing rather than a series of interconnected communications.

2. Better students (as judged by the teacher, based on class performance) applied a wider range of strategies than weaker students, and were able to describe them in a more sophisticated manner than the weaker ones who gave very superficial replies to the questionnaire.

3. Working in pairs or groups is a significant motivating force for some students, but its success depends on the compatibility of the individuals involved in terms of objectives, interests, personality, and commitment. It is particularly suited to speaking activities where students are able to share tasks and support one another.

4. Students' ability to identify objectives, plan their learning programme and assess their progress may be improved by learner training but requires careful coaching over an extended period of time.

5. Students wish to participate in decision-making regarding language learning, but need clear input on resources and other options to make informed decisions.

Reflection

Reflection, both individually and as a group, has been important throughout this action research, not only at intermittent stages. In addition, commitments to share insights within the SAAR group as well at more formal presentations such as at a Language Centre Seminar and the Teachers Develop Teachers Research Conference in Aston,UK--not to mention writing this paper--have motivated the group to reflect and clarify observations and analysis. Thus it appears that reporting provides an important impetus in the reflection process.

By the end of our first cycle we feel in a position to make several firm recommendations for the implementation of SA as a course component.

Recommendations

1. A clear emphasis must be placed on SA as a required course component.

2. Teachers need to make their expectations explicit to students.

3. Students must be held accountable for how they use their SA time.

4. Students need a hands-on introduction to resources and facilities in the Practice Laboratory.

5. As teachers negotiate SA learning plans with students they need to offer appropriate input and to be acutely aware of the students' developing abilities to manage their own learning, generally moving from a more directed to more autonomous approach.

6. Flexibility in terms of both student groupings (individual, pair, small group) and venue for SA (within and beyond the Practice Laboratory) are important, to ensure that SA meets individual interests, learning style preferences, and learning needs.

Directions for SAAR Cycle 2

The SAAR group is a fluid entity, and has already experienced the loss of one member and welcomed three new ones. Based on the experience of one cycle, we have begun to formulate both individual and group plans for Cycle 2. We will continue to pursue the overall focus on learner training and motivation. In addition, development of individual Cycle 1 objectives will proceed in most cases. New directions include monitoring the effectiveness of the new SA induction process and the use of the Logs by teachers both within and outside of the SAAR group.

In fact, we have also begun Cycle 2 actions, and proceeded with implementation of several of the recommendations noted. Group members have revised the SA unit for the EAS course, and revised and broadened the scope of the Log for use by any interested English teachers. One member is also devising an orientation game for the Practice Laboratory designed to give students hands-on experience in locating and using Practice Laboratory resources and facilities.

Conclusion

As yet, we have not drawn definite conclusions, rather we have devised recommendations for implementation (noted above), which will then be evaluated during the second cycle of our project.

In terms of Action Research, SAAR group members have described our team approach to research as "dynamic", "kinder and gentler", and "very supportive". But strict adherence to any cyclical approach would, in fact, have constrained the group process. Perhaps the greatest strength of the Action Research model is in giving a direction to reflective research, teacher development, and implementation of change.

Acknowledgements

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A Progress Report of an Action Research Project into the Marking of Students' Written Work

Denis Williamson

Participating Team : **Desmond Allison, Rose Chan, Elaine Martyn, Annie Mueller, Elizabeth Nakhoul, Anne Storey, Tse Lai Kun and Denis Williamson.**

Introduction

In the first semester 1991/92 our English enhancement course for first year students of Social Sciences involved all twenty two classes in a project with the general theme "The Medium of Instruction in Education in HK". In small groups of three or four, students decided on their own particular spheres of investigation, and worked towards final outcomes of two reports per group; one spoken, one written.

Marking the written reports was part of our normal routine and was the part we extended into the first stage of an action research project.

The Concern

While the student projects were still under way, the question arose as to how consistent the marking of these reports was likely to be from teacher to teacher. This led to a brief discussion of what criteria each of us should use when marking. By this stage, however, most teachers had already advised their own students as to which areas they were most interested in and where attention would be directed when marking, so we felt it was too late to agree common criteria, and perhaps it would be more valuable to actually find out which criteria we applied in the normal course of events before we considered whether, or even if, we should try to standardize them.

The first phase of our project, therefore, was to discover - as long as it were possible to discover - something about ourselves as markers. How would we mark our students' project reports and why?

What we might do with the findings of such an investigation would depend very much on what those findings were.

Fact-Finding : The Plan

The project attracted eight teachers[1] who submitted "clean" photocopies of all their students' reports to a co-ordinator who chose one script per teacher[2] to form a pool of eight scripts for the action research project. Each marker would, therefore, mark all his/her own class' scripts and seven more.

Only one request was made of the markers which was, perhaps, out of the ordinary; this was to record for each script :

- criteria they had informed their students of in advance,
- any other criteria they consciously applied while marking and
- other details they thought relevant at the time, which might help in later discussion.

Because each marker was also a teacher each had been supplied with basic marking details by the course writers. These were :

- "the grade:mark relationship is a ten point scale of A = 10, B+ = 9 down to D = 1 and D - = 0, where the two lowest grades represent "inadequate" work".

The degree to which each of us noticed, understood or applied those instructions was left to the individual, as it would be in the normal course of events. We were, of course, investigating ourselves, not the system.

After marking and collating the marks, we would sit down together and, through discussion, try and find out exactly why we had given the marks we had given.

Fact-Finding : Carrying Out The Plan

We marked the scripts. The grades and marks we gave to each are shown below. These data take on a more informative appearance when shown as -

(i) the range of marks given to each script, and
(ii) the range of marks produced by each teacher.

The data in Fig. 2 highlighted the fact that grades given to some scripts varied considerably, whilst those in Fig. 3 indicated different tendencies among the markers.

THE DATA

Fig. 1 A. R. Marking Project
Marks Given

Teacher \ Script	8102 (b)	8106 (c)	8301 (a)	8302 (a)	8304 (a)	8305 (a)	8305 (b)	8402 (a)
Anne S	5 C+	8 B+	3 C-	3 C-	9 A-	8 B+	8 B+	6 B-
Annie M	7 B	6 B-	5 C+	4 C	6 B-	6 B-	5 C+	4 C
Denis	8 B+	7 B	5 C+	7 B	6 B-		7 B	5 C+
Desmond	7 B	6 B-	8 B+	4 C	8 B+	6 B-	5 C+	8 B+
Elaine	4 C	9 A-	6 B-	3 C-	8 B+	7 B	6 B-	3 C-
Lai Kun	7 B	7 B	4 C	6 B-	9 A-		8 B+	5 C+
Liz N	8 B+	8 B+	6 B-	4 C	7 B		8 B+	5 C+
Rose	5 C+	6 B-	4 C	2 D+	8 B+	6 B-	5 C+	4 C

Fig. 2
Range of Marks given to each SCRIPT

Script	Grades Received per Script										
	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-
8102 (b)			=	=		=	—				
8106 (c)		—	=	=	=						
8301 (a)			—		=	=	=	—			
8302 (a)				—	—		=	=	—		
8304 (a)		=	=	—	=						
8305 (a)			—	—	=						
8305 (b)			=	—	—	=					
8402 (a)			—		—	=	=	—			

Fig. 3
Range of Marks given by each TEACHER

Teacher	Grades Awarded by each Teacher										
	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-
ANNE S.		—	=		—	—		=			
ANNIE M.				—	=	=	=				
DENIS			—	=	—	=					
DESMOND			=	—	=	—	—				
ELAINE		—	—	—	=		—	=			
LAI KUN		—	—	=	—	—	—				
LIZ N.			=	—	—	—	—				
ROSE			—		=	=	=		—		

Although one script proved too elusive for one or two markers, there came a time when we felt we had enough data to enter the next stage of the investigation and so we arranged two sets of meetings to discuss what we had done and why. The first saw the eight of us divide into pairs and discuss two scripts each, to allow some organized input to the second meeting, which we all attended.

In both meetings, we discussed; we explained how we had marked, we questioned why others had marked as they did, we pointed out features of students' work we had appreciated and those we had not, we admitted missing certain features altogether when they were pointed out to us and, although we frequently slipped into the trap of feeling we had to defend what we had done, we managed to bring out several important observations.

Fact-Finding : The Outcome

1. We often agreed on the features we expected students to pay attention to in their reports, but the degree of detail we used in describing each, and the value we attached to each feature varied considerably from marker to marker.

e.g. (a) One marker had a list of seven main features or categories, each containing multiple items, which acted as a check list while marking. Another had only three general categories, which subsumed almost exactly the same features, yet the details were not explicit.

e.g. (b) We all seemed to expect that a good report would include an analysis of the data that students had collected, with certain conclusions or recommendations being developed from this analysis, and again, we expected a report to connect all the parts of the project into a cohesive whole, so that the development of the theme could be easily perceived by the reader.

However, the degree to which we thought the students had succeeded in accomplishing these tasks varied quite considerably. A marker with interests in statistics who took the trouble to check data written in the text, with data shown in diagrammatic form and in tables, with conclusions drawn from this data - came down heavily on students who had "faked" their conclusions in the face of the data. Yet a marker more concerned with a report which was a cohesive whole would certainly have noticed that the data and the conclusions were there, but may not have noticed the discrepancy between them.

2. Not too far removed from N° 1 was the observation that some of us tended to mark the report as a stand alone "product", while others tried to assess how well students had gone through the "process" of performing the project and they saw the report as simply one manifestation of this process.

e.g. The "process-oriented" group, wanted to see how well students had (say) thought out a relevant project task, designed a means of collecting data, collected that data, interpreted it and presented it. So if students had gone through the first three steps without too much aberration, but had made a bit of a mess of interpreting their data, which was then reflected in an otherwise acceptable presentation - then as far as the process was concerned they had done four fifths of it "successfully", made a mess of one fifth (the interpretation) and a mark for "process" would reflect those proportions, and could be quite high.

If that same report were marked as a "product", then the fact that the data had been misinterpreted could mean that the report was less than worthless; the conclusions would be misleading and even potentially dangerous. A mark for "product" would reflect that and would be very low.

3. We differed in our perception of what the grades actually stood for.

Some of us perceived the range of grades as representing "excellent", "good" and "poor" in terms of what is expected from a 1st year undergraduate in HKU, while others were more inclined to see the grades as representing the same attainments in terms of what is expected from report writers in a more universal sense - in the real world.

Although we all thought we knew about norm and criterion referenced assessment, for some of us the discussions served to blur the boundaries we thought we had seen. The main fact to emerge was that although most of us had strong reasons for taking the stance we took, none of us had really considered that others might take a different stance. Clearly we need to talk to each other more often.

Markers who had perceived 1st year undergraduate competence as the basis of their assessment are noticeable in the data because they have given grades that cover almost the whole range available. Although they had chosen to assess students within these somewhat subjective parameters, the parameters were based not just on the results of this one group, but on years of experience of marking writing from the same type of student.

Markers who based their scores on more universal competence are also noticeable in the data as they were unable to award either very high, or very low marks. At the top end, they found no report that was good enough to (say) publish in the real world, and at the bottom end the fact that students had actually gone through the whole project and produced a report meant that one could scarcely have given them less than half marks. To do so would allow little differential between them and students who had not done the task at all.

The Next Step

Although the total process of assessing Social Science students in English allows individual differences in one assignment to be evened out somewhat by a full year of continuous assessment and a (double marked) end of course test, it is quite likely that some differences extend further than we yet imagine.

There is, even now, the possibility that we can learn more about our individual differences in marking by simply resuming the discussion we had earlier, and it is also clear that the issues already raised can interact and complement each other to cause even more-complex reasons for those differences. It would seem like a good idea to continue the project.

To add to the observations mentioned above there are several other issues of interest which came up in our discussion. They include :

- the possibility of developing student "profiles" to replace simple marks or grades.
- the various "functions" of grades - from use as "student motivators" through use for monitoring progress to use as "something to write on degree certificates".
- the idea of defining a whole range of assessment categories from which relevant selections could be made each time there is an assignment, and
- how values could best be placed on these categories.

From these issues our next task will be to formulate a plan. This plan will involve taking some action; intervening in the existing context and changing it in some way, so that we might observe the results of our action. It seems there could be even more excitement ahead!

Watch this space.

* * *

NOTES

1. In actual fact, although all of the markers were Language Centre teachers, two of the eight did not teach Social Sciences students and so did not have the actual task of marking for students. They marked only for the action research project. The other six marked for both purposes.

2. The scripts were unread when they were chosen. For the two markers with no classes (see 1 above) the number was made up to eight by including two scripts from one class (8305) and two scripts from one teacher with two classes (8102 & 8302).

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Electronic Mail as a Tool to Enable Purposeful Communication

David Gardner

This report describes the involvement of a small group of students of The University of Hong Kong (HKU) in an ongoing project in which electronic mail is used as the medium of communication. The project itself arose from a request for correspondents who would be willing to maintain contact with two classes of ESL students taking a pre-sessional course at City University, New York (CUNY). A major part of that course involves gathering data about social and cultural attitudes in an international context. These students will have access, via international E-mail, to consultants around the globe. The level of formality with which exchanges takes place will vary from one site to another; consultants are frequently unsupervised individuals. The project at HKU however, attempts to exploit the pedagogical potential that this consultation process offers. While it is too early to assess the full potential of this approach it would appear to have aroused a high level of motivation among participants. It is hoped that lessons learned in this pilot scheme can be applied in a more ambitious project at a later date.

Electronic mail uses computer networks to transmit messages between computers at the same or different sites. It is an ideal medium for language learners as it is less immediate than the telephone but much faster than conventional mail. Participants have the time to compose their messages before transmission but have the satisfaction of knowing that their message will be received within a few hours of transmission. Even allowing for international time zones a well organised pair of correspondents could send a message and receive a reply on a daily basis if desired. The medium has similarities to that of the fax, but with greater flexibility in the handling of messages. The overriding advantage for users in educational institutions is that electronic mail is free of charge.

The students participating in this project have all just successfully completed the first year in the Information Stream of the Computer Science undergraduate degree programme at HKU. While the nature of their studies ensured that by the beginning of the project they were all suitably computer literate, their knowledge of electronic mail was less secure. They understood the concept of E-mail but had generally mastered only the absolute minimum of commands. This lack of E-mail sophistication prevented them from keeping copies of messages received and sent. It also condemned them to producing messages of inferior quality because of their lack of awareness of the editing facilities. Their previous experience of E-mail had been confined to exchanging mail with other students, mostly in the same institution but sometimes with other sites in Hong Kong.

Participation in this project had, of necessity, to be severely restricted to a small group, five students, who could work with minimal supervision during the summer months. It became clear at an early stage that those students choosing to take part in this project were highly motivated. In fact it was the persistence of these students in pursuing what had, earlier in the year, been a tentative remark that resulted in their involvement in the project.

It is sometimes difficult to isolate real causes of motivation. Participants reported that motivation, couched in various forms, was a desire to practise their English while exploring the cultural differences of other speakers of English as a Foreign Language from other cultural backgrounds. It is not coincidental that these were broadly the terms used when first suggesting to the students that they be involved.

Although there is no reason to doubt this source of motivation, anecdotal evidence suggests that another factor was at least as strong; as students of computer science, these students had an intrinsic interest in exploring the limits of the computer facilities at their disposal. The fact that they had a poorly developed E-mail awareness is a reflection of the frustration that had experienced with it. When questioned, they obviously knew of the huge communicative potential but had found little practical use for it. They used it with their classmates but had no real need to, as they saw each other every day. The opportunity to communicate with America in a meaningful way, coupled with the need to master the system more thoroughly appears to have been highly motivating, especially as it occurred at a time when they were freer from other work obligations.

In short, the desire to practice English was at best equal, but probably subordinate to, a desire to have a real reason for using E-mail. This is of no consequence because whether it is a high priority or not, the participants will, throughout the project, be practising their English. All teachers are aware of the need to provide variety and in particular to provide stimulation through new activities. For these students E-mail has a novelty value, practising English does not.

The role of consultant which the HKU students play in this project, carries with it a burden of responsibility. The CUNY students will be inclined to accept the information from Hong Kong students as being representative of the views of the population of Hong Kong. In order to be effective consultants, the HKU students may decide that they themselves need to consult more widely. It is also possible that at times they might decline to answer certain questions and will need to explain why. Or, before answering questions, they will need to seek further clarification.

The method by which students act as consultants is at their own discretion. They may wish to reply to questions as individuals, or they may prefer to meet (either in real time, or electronically) to discuss questions and produce collective answers. They may choose a combination of methods. One thing that is certain is that participants will need to employ a full range of reading and writing skills to be effective. They will also need to be well organised and to keep careful records of mail received and sent.

The open-ended nature of this project makes it exciting but also introduces a high risk factor for the language learner. There is great potential for misunderstanding, error and loss of face. Participants are aware of this risk but balance it against the potential gains of meaningful communication in a real situation and the hopes of establishing longer term contacts with their English speaking peers.

By way of preparation students received training on the detailed functions necessary for producing carefully edited messages and for coping with the administration of the larger quantity of mail they would be dealing with. In addition they were encouraged to consider and discuss the implications of communicating, almost instantaneously, with unknown correspondents from culturally diverse backgrounds. It is interesting to note how participants found it difficult to become aware of the cultural values which form part of the shared knowledge when communicating within a culture but which can become a barrier when communicating inter-culturally. It is encouraging to report that once they had understood this concept they recognised its value.

Although it is too early to assess the final outcome of this project it is clear that benefits experienced in the preparatory stage alone have been enough to justify the time spent on it. During this time the student-student and student-supervisor interactions have been linguistically rich. In addition, awareness of the cultural context in which language is used has been raised considerably.

Throughout the project all messages received and sent will be recorded. An analysis of this data together with a detailed final debriefing of participants should provide guidelines for the development of future projects. It is hoped that it will be possible to experiment with a variety of approaches which might include E-mail exchanges within the institution as well as between one institution and another, both locally and internationally.

Readers of this report who are interested in developing E-mail exchanges between their students and those of Hong Kong University are invited to contact the author by electronic mail at:
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Discourse Awareness In Student Writing

Desmond Allison.

Project Outline

Objective

To investigate aspects of discourse awareness shown or lacking in students' academic writing; to assess effects of such features upon teacher and student perceptions of successful task performance.

Duration

January 1990 - June 1992. The project was established to formalise and focus a number of active and convergent research interests; no funding was involved.

Investigators

Desmond Allison (English Centre, formerly with Language Centre, HKU; principal investigator);
Nigel Bruce (English Centre and Language Centre, HKU);
Evelyn Cheung (Language Centre, HKU; on extended leave from mid-1991);
Lily Leung (Language Centre, HKU);
Jo Lewkowicz (English Centre and Language Centre, HKU);
Peggy Ng (English Department, City Polytechnic of Hong Kong (CPHK); associated with the project from mid-1991).

Scope and limitations

Pedagogic concerns over identifying and developing quality in academic writing in English underlay the project from the start. "Quality" is an elusive and problematic notion, and the research was concerned with judgements of different participants and with features of students' writing that might contribute to these judgements. The understanding of "academic writing" was a broad one, having more to do with a serious treatment of topics in university English language classes than with other restrictions on topic choice or genre. Researchers looked at examination scripts, in-class writing and assigned coursework.

"Discourse" can be taken either as language extending beyond the sentence or as language put to use in contexts to convey meanings and messages. In studies of continuous writing, both meanings apply, but the primary sense of "discourse" for this research is that of language put to use, including the effects of a writer's textually stated or inferrable purposes and perspectives on appropriateness of linguistic choices.

Other developments at HKU limited the time that could be devoted to the project, and further strengthened the researchers' emphasis upon matters affecting course evaluation, materials development or teaching methods. The project remained loosely knit, with most work being done in pairs or threes or by individuals. The main areas of activity are summarised in this report. References to work with "others" are taken up in the acknowledgements.

Summary of Research Areas and Outcomes

It is convenient for reporting purposes to distinguish three areas relating to the identification of features and the attempted resolution of problems that characterise students' written English discourse:

1. Discourse awareness and tests of writing.

2. What English language teachers and teachers of academic subjects look for and react to when evaluating students' written discourse.

3. Developing text planning and revision abilities: Teacher and learner perceptions of improvement in student writing.

This report includes fuller treatment of some aspects of the research that have not previously been discussed in publications.

1. Discourse awareness and tests of writing

Two virtues that are widely attributed to testing in the course of language teaching operations are that processes of test design and test evaluation will entail a close look at teaching objectives, and that appropriate language tests can have beneficial washback effect on a curriculum. The present research has included a number of studies of writing test scripts. These were undertaken in order to obtain information about characteristic strengths and limitations of students' writing, with special regard to discourse awareness, and to suggest how such information could be of use on future courses.

Allison and Cheung (1991) investigated individual performance on the writing test given to incoming first-year undergraduates in the Faculty of Arts at HKU in order to select students for (and exempt others from) additional English language courses. The authors concluded that the discourse demands of the test were more limited than might have appeared, and that the test design and test grades had in fact more to do with second language proficiency than with writing expertise (see Cumming (1989) for these two factors). They called for careful evaluation in the Language Centre of the nature of course goals and test expectations with respect to students' abilities and needs in writing academic discourse.

Other developments have since removed the need for this particular selection and placement test (since all Arts students will follow the same English enhancement course), but the question of what is to be taught and tested remains crucial both for coursework and for final testing. The end-of-course tests that have recently been developed and banked are designed to tap aspects of writing expertise (as well as language proficiency) that are considered important in academic communication. These integrative tests require students to draw upon their notes during a listening test, and upon a text used in a reading test, to produce an academic essay that discusses a question and makes suitable interpretative references to the textual source materials. This cumulative exposure to and utilisation of the source materials constitutes an instance of "experience"-based testing (Nation (1990); Read (1991)).

The demands made upon "writing expertise" by these final tests appear considerably more complex than those of the 'then and now' comparison in the Allison and Cheung study. It also seems clear that the grammatical demands of such writing tasks will have been substantially affected by the availability of source texts, and by the expectation that students will select and incorporate relevant arguments in their own responses. This is not to imply that grammatical demands become insignificant in such tests (a view that results would certainly not support). The point is simply that responding to and making appropriate use of sources makes the writing task distinctive in nature.

Leung, Allison and Lewkowicz conducted an in-house study of first-year Arts students' written responses in a final test. They compared the performance of "good" and "poor" writers, as identified by their writing test scores, on measures of length, grammatical development (mean length of T-units; mean number of error-free T-units), and ratings of aspects of the discourse organisation ("introduction", "development", "conclusion" and in-text "references"). The grammatical measures yielded more modest contrasts between the "good" and "poor" groups than in the Allison and Cheung study. The plausibility of these quantitative predictors of syntactic complexity in students' writing was also more than usually questionable, since individual results were obviously affected by cases of citation or of unacknowledged "lifting" from source texts.

On the other hand, clear differences between the two groups of writers were found on researchers' ratings for all four discourse variables. The most notable differences were found for

"development" and "conclusion". The difference for "introductions" was somewhat less marked. Ratings for "references" were generally low, as in-text and bibliographical references were absent from many scripts.

While such summaries leave much untold, the study had shown that discourse considerations were in evidence in both the wording and the implementation of marking schemes for the test in question. However, a degree of agreement between original markers' overall grading of scripts and the researchers' ratings on discourse variables is not yet very informative. The next steps are to seek to determine more precisely the linguistic and rhetorical basis for the ratings given, and to assess implications for the teaching of academic writing on the associated course. The paper by Bruce and Lewkowicz (1991) explores these questions, focussing specially on what the authors refer to as "topic development" (ordering of referential elements within sentences, with particular attention to grammatical subject position) and "thematic development" (manifested in topic sequence at the level of the paragraph and above; see their p. 364 for discussion and other references).

2. What English language teachers and teachers of academic subjects look for and react to when evaluating students' written discourse

Bruce and Lewkowicz (1991) set out to compare responses of language and subject teachers to samples of student writing, and to identify linguistic and rhetorical features of texts that appeared to affect teacher ratings. The samples of writing in this study were again essay scripts that had been produced under test conditions, but that drew upon listening and reading inputs in earlier parts of the test. The authors were particularly interested in aspects of "language" use that might affect the transparency of textual "content" - thereby calling into question the prevalent but potentially misleading dichotomisation of these two terms in many informal discussions of academic writing.

The authors could not make strong claims about rating criteria used by "language teachers" as opposed to "subject teachers". They found that considerable within-category variation can be anticipated, even where there is ostensible agreement on stated criteria. One danger they noted is that language teachers may sometimes become preoccupied with rhetorical strategy per se, while losing track of effects on the actual message. There were also cases in which absence of clarity in the introduction and conclusion of an essay had a particularly strong negative impact on the rating given by a subject teacher.

Further work on a more extensive scale, led by Bruce, continues to investigate the degree to which marking criteria underlying language teacher and subject teacher ratings can usefully be specified, and the extent to which operational criteria may prove to converge or to diverge within and between the two groups of raters. This more recent work has been concerned with project reports, mostly produced by groups of four or five students over a period of several weeks. (Language teacher ratings of project reports are also being explored by an action research group at the Language Centre, HKU: see report in this issue by Denis Williamson.)

While rightly warning against premature generalisation of findings from their small sample at HKU, Bruce and Lewkowicz were able to point to a number of features of student writing that were widely found to be problematic (i.e. that were so adjudged in several instances, and by different raters). Principal among these were:

- overuse and misuse of logical connectors (over-reliance on connectors may stem from previous teaching: c.f. Crewe (1990));
- over-attenuation of reference for pronominal subjects, especially for "it";
- what the authors call "the 'Guru' fallacy" (p. 371), whereby students offer massive and uncritical listings of what X or Y "said", "stated", etc.;
- a lack of direction and of overall synthesis in the introduction and the conclusion;
- absence from the body of texts of sufficiently clear moves across levels of generality (evident also from the number and nature of paragraph breaks made by student writers, as compared with those proposed by language and subject teachers).

Other researchers in the team have confirmed that students encounter considerable difficulties in developing a coherent and independent discussion while making use of source texts. Part of the problem may involve discourse comprehension, especially recognition of an author's viewpoint (c.f. Allison and Ip (1991)). Another major consideration, pursued in Leung (fc), is the relationship in students' academic writing between communication abilities and critical thinking. Ability to summarise key points from extended texts without losing track of one's own overall argument is also at issue. In all cases, problems are likely to arise for students who can write quite clearly on less demanding tasks.

From a thematic perspective, Bruce and Lewkowicz (1991) recommend that student writers need to be taught to focus on and specify what it is that they want to say in a text as a whole. Such awareness of overall purpose is both a well-established communicative principle and a prerequisite for academic writing that is independent and critically alert. In terms of topic development, at the level of the sentence (or of the proposition), students must be taught to avoid the overuse of connectors, and must learn to make fuller use of lexically rich grammatical subjects in initial position. The authors also see an important role for explicit teaching of topic-comment structure and its effects on the emergence of a writer's message. They propose that command of logical connectors, and ability to develop an identifiable topic within a paragraph, should feature prominently among criteria in essay marking schemes.

Valuable as such recommendations are, their implementation in teaching programmes remains problematic and in need of further study. The formulation and pursuit of research questions in this area must clearly continue. At the same time, it is important to evaluate pedagogical initiatives that have resulted from the work in progress, and to see how far diagnoses may already be followed by improvements.

3. Developing text planning and revision abilities: Teacher and learner perceptions of improvement in student writing

The intention of the researchers throughout this project has been to add to knowledge of students' abilities and difficulties in order to offer teachers a better informed basis for action and guidance. One practical consequence has been the revision or development of teaching materials, including the following initiatives:

(a) the revision of a unit on Thematic Development (originally by Bruce) on HKU English language courses for Arts students (work by Allison and others) and for Social Science students (Bruce and Leung).

(b) the writing and piloting of a unit on Text Revision in the course for Arts students (Allison and others).

(c) the writing of self-access materials that make use of reformulated student writing (Allison and others).

(d) the preparation of sample text revision materials for secondary schools: this work, appearing in Allison (1991b) and in Allison and Ng (fc), drew on the project at HKU and related activities at CPHK.

Considerable time was spent in observing the effects, and evaluating the effectiveness, of such pedagogic interventions, and the following discussion draws on this additional strand of the research.

Two general issues that arise in teaching writing to students at an advanced level are the extent to which it is useful to teach learners "about" those aspects of language use in which they need to make improvements, and the relative merits of teaching that takes place either before or after students first draft their responses to a writing task.

In principle, there seems to be considerable scope on advanced courses for work that aims to raise student awareness of problematic features in their own or in classmates' writing, and of how such

texts may be improved, either through more thoughtful planning or through revision (to the extent that such a distinction between phases may be useful). While abundant practice must be strongly encouraged as well, one has to recognise that courses with limited teaching hours may be in no position to provide or to require the sheer quantity of experience that could of itself generate "obvious" improvement in students' writing. Academic communication courses at HKU, for instance, last for just 60 hours, are spread over two semesters, and are not confined to the teaching of writing; most HKU students have already had twelve years' experience of English in schools, and all students have many other priorities in their first year at university. The need for focussed use of teaching time ought to be apparent.

HKU Language Centre materials that address essay planning through preparatory activities include work on the analysis of question wordings; elicitation from students themselves of the features that in principle make a good introduction, a good conclusion and a good essay; presentation of ideas about "given-new" information structure. Problems that can arise, however, include lack of student (and sometimes teacher) motivation for such work, either because some of the general principles are familiar from school, or because other principles are considered difficult to interpret and apply.

Pedagogical concerns of the present research have been mainly with teaching that takes place during the writing process. The forthcoming study by Leung addresses the teaching of critical thinking skills to improve the quality of revised drafts. Work by Allison at HKU and by Ng at CPHK has focussed on the development of students' abilities to revise draft texts.

Among the possible advantages of such approaches are that principles and problems of discourse awareness are immediately exemplified in the context of a writing task. Work on text revision involves students in identifying specific problems, and in making changes to draft texts with the aim of improving them. Such work can still be frustrating at times to students, who would naturally prefer to write well effortlessly, rather than having to work hard at planning and revising their drafts. Part of the teaching message has to be that many good writers only produce their work after a process of careful re-reading and revision (and that those who are able to do otherwise have usually thought long and hard before they write).

Another essential point, which Leung's current work in particular seeks to address, is that effective revision entails the rethinking and refining of a writer's intentions, and is not just a routine (and teacher-directed) tidying-up of an otherwise unexamined textual product. In the words of Flower (1990, p.244):

> I think we need to conceptualize academic writing and the attempt to learn it as a strategic process in which the writer's goals and metacognitive awareness play a critical part.

Allison (1991b; 1991c, p.131-133), and Allison and Ng (fc), building on work reported by Allwright et al (1988), have discussed the use of teachers' reformulations of students' writing as a means of leading students to compare the original draft and the reformulation, identify changes that were made, suggest why these changes were made, decide whether they have proved effective, and finally seek to apply any insights gained to the revision of their own texts. An alternative approach has been to provide students with a revision exercise for short texts, and to use a reformulation as a basis for later comparison. Such work has been taken up in some course materials, and has recently been extended to self-access writing activities. Reformulated student essays with missing sections have been used as prompts for 'Storyboard' text reconstruction activities (authoring package from Wida software).

Classroom focus has shifted in such instances from the very general aim of "practising writing" to goals of "learning to improve draft texts through revision and editing". Such work is clearly not restricted to "discourse awareness", as it may sometimes lend itself to purely grammatical editing, but the focus of many grammatical choices (including selection of tenses) as well as lexical choices has been on the highlighting and the sequencing of information by the writer for the readers. Raising student awareness of such dimensions of grammatical choice is itself a challenge, as much earlier work in schools has reportedly either tended to avoid grammar or to address it in terms of editorial accuracy rather than of effects on meaning.

The various pedagogical possibilities, and problems, in using reformulations in the teaching of text revision, deserve fuller study in different classes, possibly through action research. Some of the author's recent observations as teacher/observer in lessons with one class of Arts students at HKU will now be summarised.

When simply comparing an original and a reformulated text, some students who were able to describe and account for observed "improvements" declared that they themselves would still not be able to effect such changes in their own drafts. Here, it seemed important to the teacher to reconcile the learners' expressed need for more practice with a clear idea of what was to be practised. Tailormade revision exercises offered a possible approach. In one instance, to be described below, a selected student essay was revised in limited time (on a word processor) by each member of the class, following pair or group discussion of the revision exercise.

Performance on this activity apparently distinguished between student "revisers", who had learnt to move and reshape text in order to clarify the development of a discourse, and other "editors" who remained much more constrained by the form the draft text had assumed. Two students who found it particularly difficult to revise this draft and other draft texts appeared to be careful planners in their own writing. The needs and aptitudes of such writers call for further investigation, not least in relation to process-oriented teaching approaches that encourage rapid drafting and revision as ways of facilitating and improving the writing process.

Demonstrating "improvement" in students' writing, on a course which is not intensive, can be problematic. A portfolio of work can be helpful, yet there remain serious difficulties in comparing performance across different tasks. Improvement on specific drafts through text revision is frequently more immediately apparent.

The remainder of this section will outline some general findings about progress in students' writing, on a course that was intensively evaluated by the researchers and others. The next section of the paper will illustrate some of the discourse problems that can arise in a student's essay, and some of the improvements that students can make to a draft.

In the course of an in-house evaluation of students' written work on the first pilot phase of the "Academic Communication and Study Skills" course at HKU (1990/91, B.B.A. students), Allison, Bruce, Lewkowicz and Leung reported improvements in the following respects:

- general to specific topic development (and use of examples);

- explicit awareness of task demands, as shown by (i) advance organisers; (ii) analysis or definition of key terms; (iii) appropriate summative statements;

- "This" + lexical subject use.

The researchers warned, however, that differences in task difficulty may have affected observed outcomes, making claims of "gain" hazardous. One unequivocal improvement was that students had also learnt to provide bibliographical information - at least in the context of their "ACSS" coursework.

Persistent problems were:

- the overuse and misuse of connectors;

- unclear pronominal reference;

- errors in grammatical concord (notably but not exclusively in more complex sentences).

Certain forms of syntactic subordination were noted as rare or absent in student writing - for example, relative clauses introduced by prepositions. This absence is predictable in terms of the "accessibility hierarchy" of different forms of relativisation (see Comrie (1981); Yip and Matthews (1991).)

Such limitations can further restrict a writer's capacity to highlight or downplay points, and to display relations between points, so that discourse development is affected.

Discourse problems and discourse awareness in student writing: an illustration

Claims in this paper about discourse awareness in student writing at HKU are drawn from extensive studies of test scripts, continuous assessment scripts, and teachers' comments on such writing. Such claims become difficult to illustrate concisely. They are also virtually impossible to validate, other than by comparison with informed experience on the part of other teachers. It is obviously possible to present samples of students' writing and to draw attention to certain features of these samples, but assertions that such features are typical, or crucial, or particularly intractable when it comes to the effects of teaching, remain summary statements of experience and judgement.

The present illustration is no exception. It is intended to breathe some life into the preceding abstractions, but does not offer "hard evidence" for the report's characterisation of discourse awareness in student writing at HKU.

In a unit on "Thematic Development" in the HKU Language Centre course in English for Arts Students (1991/92), students write an essay on a topic of their choice. Source texts are made available on various aspects of "Education in China" (a theme elsewhere in the unit), and most students choose from a list of topics relating to that theme.

Below, the opening, penultimate and closing paragraphs of one essay are presented and discussed, with some reference to text revision outcomes. The general point is that many of the infelicities of the essay stem from the writer's difficulties in making use of sources.

Extract 1: Opening paragraph of original draft
(Topic: Modern China's schooling system.)

> To have a quick social change, education is considered to be a catalyst. Improved education could lift economic productivity, improve living standards and enhance China's national status as a ultimate goal. Undoubtedly, education helps ensuring the right thinking of the young. In the following, the problems and prospects of Chinese education would be discussed.

This introduction does state the aim of the essay (final sentence), but only as a general declaration of intent that does not draw upon the preceding remarks, and does not really define or specify an approach to the question. The theme of the opening remarks appears to be the importance attached (by the government?) to education in China as a source of economic and national development. The first sentence is particularly odd because of the initial position of "To have a quick social change". Inspection of the source text (cited by the student at the end of the essay) showed that the opening sentence of the relevant chapter was as follows:

> Education rather than revolution is regarded as the catalyst for social change.
> (Cleverly, 1985, p.254.)

As the opening sentence of an essay, this might already have raised some problems: for example, the contrast with "revolution" refers back to discussion in a previous chapter. The student's rewording has eliminated that particular difficulty, but it has also violated "given-new" expectations (in view of the fact that the topic is "Modern China's schooling system", and not "Socioeconomic development in modern China").

Students' attention was again drawn to given-new expectations in a revision exercise prepared for this particular essay draft. Here are two revised student introductions for the essay (the first being by the original writer). Time was limited, and editing was not completed.

> A. China's education is a bit backward compared with the western one. Therefore, the leadership of China decided to improve it so as to enhance her living standards and national status and lift economic productivity. In general, education could lead to social change. In the following, the problems and improvements of education system would be discussed.
>
> B. Education in China is considered an important element for the improvement of a country. By improving education, social change can be enhanced. In the recent educational reform, China has gone a long way but it still confronts with problems and we are still looking forward for further improvements.

The original student's essay continued with a discussion of measures for improving education in China during and since the early 1980s. Funding problems were part of the discussion. Most of the sixth (antepenultimate) paragraph gave details of fees being charged in post-secondary education. The penultimate paragraph, reproduced in Extract 2, proves hard to characterise in terms of a single identifiable topic, while the conclusion (also below) is unconvincing, not least as no comparison with other developing countries has been offered in the essay.

Extract 2: Penultimate and concluding paragraphs of original draft

> Apart from these, more attention is being paid to moral education in order to improve students' behaviour and attitudes. In 1981, moral education was introduced as a subject for primary schools. In 1980, Confucius had returned. Classical themes have reappeared in the arts and Chinese philosophical tradition is being interpreted. In 1982, the Ministry of Education emphasized children's moral, physical and intellectual capacities. Schooling is rapidly absorbing the international educational progress as many students return from overseas such as from USA. Since the launch of the schooling reform, the number of pupils in primary school between 1979 and 1984 has doubled. Shenzhen University has adopted innovations which are of national interests and enrolments doubled since 1984.
>
> Compared with other developing countries, China has been successful in constructing a modern school system. However, more improvements is still looked for.

Part of the revision exercise directed students to identify the single or main topic of each paragraph, and to remove from that paragraph any material that was not relevant to the topic (though it might be useful elsewhere in the essay). The focus was therefore on local rather than global revision.

The penultimate paragraph as shown above proved difficult for students to revise, partly but not only because of time limitations. The topic would at first seem to be the reintroduction of moral education, yet the paragraph ends with the doubling of student numbers in two contexts (of which the second was inappropriate to the purpose: 1984 was the year that the relevant university opened, with a first-year intake only, so that a doubling of numbers one year later was unremarkable). There is no evident link in the paragraph between these subtopics.

A subsequent class discussion of the paragraph, guided by leading questions from the teacher, eventually yielded a diagrammatic representation on the whiteboard that made use of higher-level generalisations about curriculum change and ultimately about "improvements" of whatever kinds. Students were then directed to write a short essay, in 10 minutes of class time, that developed the material coherently. Below are two examples, each of which in its own way offers clear organising statements that render the discourse more coherent than the original. Partly owing to time pressure,

Example C is incomplete, while both examples display basic errors, such as those of grammatical concord. Example D is the work of the writer of the original essay.

> C. China's schooling system has made great improvements in the aspect of the curriculum chosen. Capacities of the subjects were expanded. More attention is given to moral education to improve students' behaviour and attitudes. For example, in 1981, moral education was introduced as a subject for primary schools. Classical themes have also reappeared in the arts and Chinese philosophical tradition is being reinterpreted. Thus, in 1980, Confucius had returned. In 1982, the Ministry of Education even emphasized children's moral, physical and intellectual capacities.
>
> Apart from the above improvements, the international educational progress [ends here]
>
> D. Modern Chinese education system has a great improvements in recent years. First, the number of students was doubled. Concerning the curriculum of students, it was modernized and at the same time, moral education such as Confucius and classical themes were reintroduced. For eg: 1980, Confucious was returned and in 1981 moral education was reintroduced as a subject for primary schools. On the other hand, schooling is rapidly absorbing the international educational progress.

This activity had a number of interesting consequences. Three other students attempted to make an explicit link between the two ideas of curriculum change and increase in student numbers, suggesting either that the improved curriculum attracted greater numbers of students, or that the improvements were designed to cope with the increasing numbers. Example E (an extract) illustrates such a response:

> E. The modern China's schooling system improved in the recent years. It can be shown by the doubling of the student's number. The main reason for this change is greatly related to the curriculum changes....

While this may seem an unduly "free market" interpretation of events, it offers a possible reading in which the original paragraph comes closer to coherence (i.e. if the increase in numbers is taken as corroborative evidence for a claim that a return to moral education has improved the curriculum). Whether such a connection between ideas was latent in the original or was imposed by the later student writers (or by the nature of the revision task) must remain a matter for speculation.

Closing remarks

Discourse interpretation undoubtedly relies substantially on world knowledge. Instances such as those described above demonstrate the interdependence - and perhaps the inextricability - of "language" and "content" in academic reading and writing. Turning inferences about relations such as causality into explicit links in a student text can help the reader to understand - and in some cases to challenge - the writer's interpretation in the essay. How far such work is "high level", as some students and teachers affirm, or fundamental to academic discussion in many disciplines, as this teacher for one is tempted to argue, is itself a matter of interpretation.

A useful concept in much of this research, pointed out by Cheung, has been the notion of the "discourse demands" made by different tasks. Importantly (and unsurprisingly), it has repeatedly emerged that the demands made by writing tasks upon students' awareness and command of discourse vary greatly. A consequence of this variety is that things that students may do well in some cases become much more problematic in others - for example, when source texts or writing tasks become lengthier and more complex.

This observation can help to account for the different views that are commonly heard when teachers are discussing students' (in)ability to see and to produce what is expected in an essay introduction, or a conclusion, or a developing argument (inter alia). It may also throw light on a

tendency for students to differ from teachers in their estimation of what remains to be learned. Teachers are all too aware of students' inadequacies in the production of coherent and effective discourse, while students are already very familiar with basic expectations in principle, such as the need to focus on and to highlight one's main points. Another consideration is that students are used to classroom situations in which teachers already know the answer to questions that students are addressing, and in which writing that is less than clear and fluent may still gain marks for "content" from subject teachers.

Raising student awareness of discourse, and improving their writing abilities through practical activities in areas such as text planning and revision, remains a challenge. Good writing is generally hard work. Some students show reluctance to undertake such work, claiming to prefer "more practice" in writing rather than devoting time to analysis and rewriting. Yet practice, while clearly important, does not remove the need to identify what remains to be learned and improved. Other students appear to have appreciated the value of text planning and revision activities. The most heartening signs that teaching is having some effect occur in the increased care that some of these students have taken over their own assignments and project reports. Generalisations about good writing (and about discourse awareness) deserve their place when teaching can successfully bring them to life in the context of students' own writing purposes.

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Book Review

Asian Voices in English

edited by Mimi Chan and Roy Harris
Hong Kong University Press, 1991.

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In April 1990, the University of Hong Kong's English Department, in collaboration with the British Council, held a symposium entitled Asian Voices In English (hereafter referred to as AVE), 19 papers from which are included in the volume under review.

"The focus of the symposium," we are told in the Introduction, "was a series of lectures by six invited Asian writers..", four of whom, Han Suyin, Richard Kim, Bienvenido Santos and Catherine Lim, are represented here. These plenary lectures are, it must be said at the outset, a very mixed bag; unsurprising perhaps, when one considers the scope implicit in the title of the Symposium, and the variety of the writers themselves. " We have come [together at this Symposium], I think, for the first time as Asians, embedded in our own cultures..." (p.17) declares Han Suyin, while Richard Kim, in the first words of his address, declares, "I am an American, and have been one for more than a quarter of a century..." (p.23).

While Han Suyin's paper revolves around herself and her self-documented importance in the development of Asian writing in English, Richard Kim tries to establish his Asian writer's street credibility by recounting a tale involving himself and a "blue-eyed, blonde, lady bank-teller", in which we learn of his "blue-eyed, brunette wife of Danish-German ancestry" and of "a bureaucratic mishap involving a quarter of a million dollars of our business account..." (p.23). With all that money and blue-eyed blondes and brunettes around, we are obviously supposed to assume that we are in the company of a superior literary presence. It is not too surprising to find Kim, a few paragraphs later, declaring himself to be "...one writer who is madly in love with the first person singular 'I' of the English language..." (p.24). Who would have guessed?

When Kim moves away from this peacock-like display, however, and offers us an extract from his own work Lost Names, we begin to see his qualities as a writer. This very moving account of Korean village life during the Japanese occupation earlier this century describes how a young boy accompanies his father and grandfather to the cemetery to inform their ancestors that they have 'lost' their Korean names and have taken on Japanese names, in response to a command issued by the Japanese occupying force. It is a pity that such good, sensitive writing is prefaced in such a welter of 'me-speak'.

The paper by Santos articulates clearly one of the basic problems confronting all writers who opt to write in a second language - the problem of audience. As Santos puts it:

> Yet even as we try to confront ourselves and reconcile the contradictions within us and our culture, using a language we were not born to but is [sic] widely read and understood all over the world, how are we to interpret ourselves to our own, especially to those who are deprived of the opportunities that English offers in addition to their own dialects? (p.48).

He does not attempt to answer the question he poses, apart from affirming that he himself has "found an audience" and "the language that it will hear narrating the experience of expatriation is English." (p.49). This hardly amounts to an attempt to "reconcile .... contradictions", particularly as we have already been informed by the writer of the continuing decline in English in the Philippines due to that language being perceived as "elitist" and "anti-democratic" (p.49).

In Singapore, on the other hand, as Catherine Lim shows in her excellent attempt to define and reconcile contradictions, the situation is quite different: English has taken over to such an extent that Singaporeans are suffering from a spiritual malaise of a quite different nature. They have sacrificed their mother tongues - Malay, Hokkien, Tamil - for a comfortable, sophisticated, Western-oriented life-style and, as a consequence, feel "a sheepish sense of guilt". (p.36).

Lim's image of Singaporean writing in English is of many such writers as herself, from the various ethnic groups that constitute the Singaporean population, writing in English on their own "square inches of ivory" about the themes that interest them, until a time when these squares begin to coalesce, at which time "...will emerge the true Singaporean character, from which the much desired Singaporean literature will draw its inspiration. It is then that the true Singaporean identity will have arisen spontaneously and organically and been distilled as art." (p.40).

If I follow this correctly, Lim seems to be making the quite astonishing suggestion that Singaporean writers in English will find themselves the creators of their own national identity. Powerful stuff indeed which, if it comes to pass, will force not only the literary world but also the political world to take note of what is happening in poetry and fiction writing.

Discussing her own literary development, Lim describes herself as coming from an "elitist" group in that she was educated through English. This is significant in that she signally fails to perceive the possibility of there being a viable Singaporean way of life other than the English-using one to which she belongs. What of the Tamil-speaking labourers, the Malay-speaking hawkers, the Hokkien-speaking gardeners? According to Lim's argument they are denied either Singaporeanness or, indeed, a way of life at all. "As a continuing reaction against their colonial past," she writes, "Singaporeans still feel uncomfortable about openly accepting the fact that the language of the colonial masters and the lifestyle it has generated have become the real and only common Singaporean way of life." (p.36, emphasis in the original).

To claim that English language use and a Western orientation define the only common Singaporean way of life is reasonable, given that country's racially-mixed population, but to claim that they define the "real" Singaporean way of life is to banish the many Singaporean citizens who choose not to use English or who adopt a non-Western orientation (for whatever reason) to a stateless nether world of unreality. Throughout her paper, Lim refuses to entertain the possibility (let alone the desirability) of a plurality of life-styles - all distinctively Singaporean.

On this subject, a serious shortcoming of this collection is the lack of an editorial overview. It would have been extremely useful if Chan and Harris had identified some of the more striking areas of common concern and inter-relationships between various of the papers. For example, Ruth Morse's excellent paper complements that of Lim's, discussing in great depth the notion of Singaporeanness as expressed in recent novels. The papers by Osing and Bobis are both concerned with the problems of translating poetry while there are obvious parallels between Chelva Kanaganayakam's discussion of Zulfikar Ghose's Figures Of Enchantment in terms of Shakespeare's The Tempest and Douglas Kerr's discussion of Hwang's M. Butterfly.

One theme which recurs throughout AVE is the felt need to domesticate the language of the former colonizers and so reduce the alienation inherent in the adoption of a second language by reshaping it as a tool for an emergent national literature. Chand, however, in a very short paper, discusses what it feels like to be a writer "in an expatriate position" (p.51), and argues a strength-through-alienation line by saying that such writers "must forge a completely new identity" because they are not monocultural but multicultural. Such a writer, he argues, is "the world's intellectual refugee." (p.54). Who are these writers? Timothy Mo, Salman Rushdie, Kazuo Ishiguro, Han Suyin, V.S. Naipaul, Bharati Mukhajee and Ruth Jhabvala are those whom Chand identifies.

Now multiculturalism is a powerful yes-word, certainly in academic and literary circles, something that everyone is in favour of. And what Chand says may indeed be true but the problem is that the multicultural writers he identifies do not seem to see themselves as refugees. Han Suyin, for example, neither searches for roots nor feels herself to be an outsider. She writes: "Emotionally, I am involved,

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bound, to China and Chinese culture.." (p.20); and as for the influences on her writing, she says: "It is only too true that my English derives its unconscious roots from Chinese." (p.20). (If they're 'unconscious', one wishes to ask, how does she know?)

Ishiguro, too, as Hussein points out in his paper, does not see himself in this light at all but, rather, "...speaks of his primarily British literary influences..." (p.105), while Norman Page, in his illuminating paper on Ishiguro's novels, writes: "Born in Japan, Ishiguro was taken to Britain as a small child, received his education there, is resident there, and has chosen to write in English." (p.161). Yet for whatever reason, it appears necessary that these writers be pushed into a mould even when they themselves reject such stereotyping. Now that the Ukraine is struggling towards independence, one wonders how soon it will be before Mr Korzeniowski is reclaimed as one of theirs because, although of Polish origin, Jozef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski spent his first few years in the Ukraine before going to sea and learning how to write classic English novels. Maybe what Mr Ishiguro needs is a change of name.

Reading AVE, one gets little sense of what it feels like to be an Asian voice in English. Hussein sees himself as an expatriated Asian who writes in English, but he doesn't really explore what this means to him as a writer. Does he feel disabled or is he stimulated by the condition in which he finds himself? He tells us that, although he lives and works in Britain, he looks to Asia "...for imaginative nutrition and intellectual sustenance..." (p.107) yet he doesn't clarify what his sources -"China, South-East Asia, the Middle East and also Africa" (p.107) have to offer.

Nur Nina Zuhra describes the changing face of English-language drama in Malaysia, from the heady days of the late 60's to its decline in the 70's. Although the outlook for English-language theatre is improving, we are told, there remains the old problem - "...the lack of a perceived cultural base from which to draw upon..." (p.184). This is made more complex if the native culture is antagonistic towards the English language. Nur Nina Zuhra skirts round "the issue of Islam and language" by quoting a remark made at a conference to the effect that "truth can be expressed in any language" (p.184). Yes, but... surely the point is not whether a language can or cannot express truth but whether particular truths can be expressed through particular languages and whether there are some languages which distort some truths? As Roy Harris writes in his eloquent paper - English versus Islam: The Asian Voice of Salman Rushdie - "...English is not just a language, any more than Islam is just a religion." To make his point, he wonders "...whether it is likely that Rushdie's novel would have attracted the death sentence if it had been written in Catalan, or whether that sentence would ever have been pronounced if the Islamic religion had today been demographically confined to inhabitants of the island of Madagascar." (p.90).

The significance of The Satanic Verses for Harris is that, among other things, it deals directly with the main issue confronting those writers who are operating in a language which is not their mother tongue : "...the problem of how to construct a cultural identity for oneself in the face of quite incompatible pulls and demands from different cultural sources." (p.91).

As examples of the increasing international significance of the 'new literatures' in English, Zach, in his paper, points to "..the Nobel Prizes awarded to Patrick White and Wole Soyinka, the more than 5 million copies sold of Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart, Salman Rushdie's fantastic royalties, or Seamus Heaney's recent appointment to the Professorship of Poetry at Oxford.." (p.4). Leaving aside the bizarre nature of these examples, in a sense Zach is undermining not only his own argument but the arguments of many of the authors represented in this volume because the achievement of these particular writers lies not in some racial, cultural or national similarity but in their individual mastery of the English language. As Roy Harris puts it in his paper on Rushdie: "The English of his novel is not something fortuitously left over from a colonial past: it is consciously reclaimed linguistic territory." (p.93).

Commenting on a group of his poems to do with place-names, Heaney describes how he became convinced "...that one could be faithful to the nature of the English language ...and, at the same time, be faithful to one's own non-English origin..." (Corcoran, 1986 p.87). This is the conviction that still appears lacking in many Asian voices - that being faithful to the English language does not represent a betrayal of their own race, culture or society. When that conviction has been reached, and it will be reached not by social consensus or political decree but by individual effort, then Asian voices in English may begin

to speak in an English that is, as Heaney puts it, "...not so much an imperial humiliation as a native weapon." (Corcoran, 1986 p.87).

Note

1. This review is based on a review article Approximating Completeness in Language & Communication, 1992 (forthcoming).

Reference

Corcoran, N. (1986). Seamus Heaney. London: Faber & Faber.

Conference reports

JALT 91: Challenges for the 90's

Reported by Jo. A. Lewkowicz

The Japanese Association of Language Teachers held an international conference entitled **Challenges for the 90s** in Kobe, Japan, from 2 to 4 November, 1991. The Conference was aimed at a large cross-section of the EFL/ESL profession, from primary and secondary school teachers, through teacher trainers and tertiary educators to teachers in the commercial sector. The majority of the participants were from Japan, although other Asian countries and the U.S. were well represented.

Over 200 presentations were given with most being run as parallel sessions. There were, however, three plenary speakers, two from the United States and one from Britain. These speakers addressed issues relevant to current practice and likely future developments in the language classroom. In particular, Prof. Marianne Celce-Murcia of the Department of TESL/Applied Linguistics at the University of California in Los Angeles addressed the issue of the teaching of grammar. She argued that the compartmentalization of language into form, meaning and function is pedagogically unsound since it focuses learners on one aspect of language to the detriment of others, and results in certain elements of language not being taught or learned.

Professor Celce-Murcia also gave a very stimulating presentation on conversational analysis. She suggested that such analysis should be used as a basis for materials development.

Professor Brumfit, Director of the Centre for Language in Education at the University of Southampton, explored two major questions of relevance to language teaching. He first addressed the question of Communicative Language Teaching by tracing its historical development as well as its present practices around the world. He then questioned whether good teaching is necessarily communicative. He argued for a more eclectic approach towards teaching since he considers CLT is too pragmatic, too superficial and not sufficiently personal. He further advocated that it is the responsibility of governments to implement a sound language policy since language is the instrument of maximum achievement and in the near future no one language will be an identity feature of any culture. Even in countries like Britain, learners will need to know more than one language.

Professor Brumfit's second paper distinguished between classroom-based research and discipline-based research carried out in the classroom. He emphasized the importance of rigour in all research, but pointed out that classroom-based research cannot and should not rely on quantification.

The third invited speaker was Professor Anita Wenden, of York College at the City University of New York, who addressed the question of learner independence. She illustrated how well-informed independent learners usually make good language learners. She then outlined some of the strategies such learners use and suggested ways in which all learners can be helped to utilise such strategies.

A number of the parallel sessions were sponsored by publishers. These sessions were primarily aimed at those teaching in Japan and were generally concerned with promoting materials written for schools or the commercial market. Not many of these sessions were of a wider interest, though there was one that introduced an interesting book written to teach academic writing for students studying in the U.S.A.

A common thread running through a number of presentations at the conference was that of language and peace. The ways in which language can promote or inhibit peaceful relationships among social groups and individuals were explored, as was the contribution language teachers can make towards world peace and improving understanding among peoples.

Several papers, including my own, 'Testing Listening Comprehension: Can Language Testers Be Innovative?', reviewed work being carried out in the field of language testing. Perhaps the most exciting of these presentations was by Vivien Berry working at Nagoya University of Commerce and Koryo International College, Japan, entitled 'The Effect of Extraversion on Test Performance'.

There were many other worthwhile sessions, including some on teacher training, the use of video in the classroom, the use and development of CALL materials, the teaching of the four skills, and programme evaluation. There was also an excellent exhibition of books and software. All this made for a very stimulating conference, which addressed, even if it did not answer, the challenges that lay ahead for language teachers in the 1990s.

Symposium on Recent Developments in EFL Classroom Applications in the Arabian Gulf held at the English Language Teaching Unit of the University of Qatar, 10-12 December, 1991.

Reported by E. H. Nakhoul

The majority of papers presented at the Symposium focused on ELT methodology, testing and curriculum design. However, Dr Alvaro Romo, of the Autonomous University of Guadalajara, Mexico, gave an overview of the role of English as a global language, stressing that the importance of ELT should not lead to the neglect of national languages. He pointed out that learning English should no longer imply the objective of "understanding the culture of the English-speaking peoples" but rather of promoting "the understanding of other cultures". ELT must therefore meet international criteria of intelligibility, grammatical acceptability and socio-cultural appropriateness.

In the area of ELT methodology, Mr Philip King of the University of Birmingham, UK, presented some uses of concordances suitable for students doing self-access work and for teachers preparing materials or studying language patterns. He emphasised that concordances, as examples of authentic text, give information about lexis which neither a dictionary nor a grammar book can provide. He also described how students who have access to a text and a concordancer can formulate their own exercises. In a similar learner-independent vein, Ms Suzanne Swales of the British Council, Dubai, demonstrated the kind of student-generated exercises (SGE) which she has found effective in involving her students in the learning process itself. She feels that such active participation should be more meaningful than decoding teacher-contrived exercises; SGE also encourage interaction as students negotiate meaning and test mutual schemata.

Schema-theory models of reading and ELT pedagogy were discussed by Ms Beatrice Smith of Qatar University. She suggested that schema theory is limited by its emphasis on the "machine metaphor" which portrays reading as a mechanical process, and argued for the treatment of reading in the classroom as a social act. She further objected to the unnecessary preoccupation with authorial intention in the machine-based model of reading. Instead, she advocated a pedagogy which would emphasise the role of the reading agent as a social being and the prior knowledge that agent brings to the text. She reported on her experiments with pre-reading activities designed to increase available background knowledge and consequently to improve performance on comprehension questions. Such activities, she felt, are compatible with the Arab culture and ensure that students will learn effectively.

Two papers, one by this reviewer, 'Bridging the Gap between Secondary and Tertiary Education: A Case Study in English Language Teaching Program Design', based on work in Kuwait prior to the Gulf War tackled the problem of the mismatch between secondary school teaching and tertiary education's ELT needs. A Faculty-based solution to the problem was to redesign the curriculum to bridge the gap in students' ELT proficiency, while a University-wide solution was to design an EL screening test.

Although this symposium was regionally influenced, the papers reflected concerns which are echoed internationally in ELT and it provided an excellent forum for discussion of such issues.

Quilt and Quill: Maintaining and Achieving Quality in Language Teaching and Learning
The Seventh I.L.E. Conference, 17-19 December 1991.

Reported by Valerie Pickard

This local conference, held in the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, attracted approximately 350 participants while over a hundred papers and workshops were given in either English (75%) or Chinese (25%) including both Cantonese and Putonghua. Five of the eight plenary sessions were presented in English. They were:

Dr. John Brownell, 'Quality and Equality in Education';
Professor W. Butzkamm, 'Language Teaching in the Nineties: New Foundations for Old Principles';
Professor Frances Christie, 'Preparation of Teachers for teaching English Literacy: What constitutes Essential Knowledge';
Dr. William Littlewood, 'Towards the Development of Internal Criteria for Judging Quality';
Professor N. Reeves, 'Critical Issues in Achieving Quality in Language Learning and Teaching: The Application of Total Quality Management Principles to Curriculum Planning and Design'.

These will be published in full in the forthcoming Conference Proceedings. In addition to the thought-provoking over-view provided by these 60-minute plenary sessions there was also a great range of topics addressing more specific issues in the eight 45-minute parallel sessions held throughout the rest of the day.

For me this conference was a good opportunity to catch up on interests and work being done in other tertiary institutions both in and outside Hong Kong. Belinda Ho of the City Polytechnic, Hong Kong reported her application of action research techniques to the analysis of factors involved in the teachers' decision making process when following the same syllabus with three different EAP classes. After each lesson she made detailed, 'objective', notes which helped her gauge how much her decision taking was influenced by her knowledge of the students' reactions to the materials and behaviour in class.

Student reactions to a task-oriented syllabus and their potential for contributing to syllabus design was the focus of Erlinda Boyle's (Chinese University, Hong Kong) presentation. She suggested that however well-designed and taught, the EAP/ESP syllabus would be better received by students if their input was encouraged. Her suggestions for student involvement included peer teaching, with older students helping those newly encountering the difficulties that they have also had to deal with; and students identifying and working in groups on particularly challenging texts from their subject disciplines.

With a large number of Hong Kong Chinese in their ESL program, a number of teachers from Carleton University, Canada, were in attendance once again. An excellent overview of their intensive program was presented by Janna Fox, linking the innovative methods they use to the theories and research that underpin them. Among the features she discussed were collaborative assessment and evaluation, writing folders and instructional materials of their own making.

Working with Japanese students of geography, Wendy Bowcher (Temple University, Tokyo) analyzed the choices they made when giving oral presentations. She presented video recordings of several students and had concentrated her analysis on the schematic structure of the introductions, development of the topic, and conclusions. An interesting point about the latter was that the students tended to end with a piece of self-evident, non-academic advice such as "don't live in an earthquake zone if you want to improve your chances of living".

In similar vein, I would like to finish by recommending you to go to the next ILE conference to keep abreast of developments in the areas of language teaching that interest you: dates for the 1992 ILE Conference are December 15 - 18th.

ELT And Applied Linguistics In Colloquium: AAAL & TESOL 92

Reported by Nigel J. Bruce

For the second year running, TESOL and the American Association of Applied Linguistics (AAAL), affiliate of the international organisation AILA, have held their conferences back-to-back; this year, with TESOL in Vancouver, Seattle was chosen for the AAAL Conference on the preceding weekend. Since TESOL and AAAL are the foremost annual international conferences in the language teaching and applied linguistics field, this move has proved very popular; practising teachers, even in tertiary institutions, are fortunate if they receive leave and funding for one conference per annum.

What makes the North American experience so relevant to applied linguists in Hong Kong is that the American & Canadian higher education systems have

1) the largest concentration of immigrant as well as overseas students pursuing a tertiary education in a 2nd/foreign language;

2) an intensive focus on the development of academic writing skills, with an increasing emphasis on inter-disciplinary collaboration, as 1st-language programmes come to absorb 2nd-language students;

3) a very healthy professional structure, in which EAP teaching (of undergraduates), research conducted on undergraduate populations and their discourse, and teacher training (of post-graduate students and post-experience teachers) all blend to invigorate and 'renew' research and curriculum design in the field.

It was clear from both these conferences that applied linguistics work in the USA and Canada is thriving; the TESOL Convention has now reached such proportions (7,500 participants in 1992) that it can comfortably keep participants fully occupied pursuing any of 16 Interest or 23 Content Area sub-specialisms of ELT/applied linguistics. An interesting development of the professionalisation of these specialisms has been the increasing use of colloquia as a forum for presenting work in a sub-field of applied linguistics or language teaching.

High-quality colloquia so dominated these two conferences, that my account of highlights of the conference revolves around colloquia relating to tertiary EAP, particularly on writing, research and testing and programme evaluation, all stimulating, well-planned sessions. The rationale for this development is not difficult to discern. The conference organisers delegate responsibility for such colloquia, well ahead of the conference, to prominent figures in a particular field, who then assume responsibility for the coherence and quality of the final assembly of papers. Participants are thus guaranteed sustained 'nourishment' in a field of their choice. One possible drawback of such an arrangement is that where organisers pull together researchers of too similar an orientation, the colloquia lack tension and diversity of approach. This was highlighted at an SLA Research colloquium at AILA 1990, when it was the discussant who brought tension and a different perspective to the occasion, criticizing the presenters for the absence of a sociolinguistic dimension to much of their work. The benefits, however, far outweigh such possible disadvantages: by delegating the organisation of a range of specialised colloquia to prominent figures in various fields, the conference organisers are multiplying the amount of attention and academic expertise being given to each aspect of the conference.

At AAAL, among a number of colloquia of high quality and interest to ESL tertiary teachers was 'Constituting social life through talk: interweaving perspectives from conversation analysis, ethnography and activity theory' chaired by Elinor Ochs, and featuring the work of Emmanuel Schlegloff's department at UCLA. Bambi Schieffelin's work with the Kaluli in Papua New Guinea evoked parallels with the Roman Catholic Church's use of Latin as an agent of popular control; she relates how Christian missionaries in PNG ritually invoked the authority of a text being used to develop literacy (the Bible). During this missionary colonisation, the text never needed to offer evidence to support claims made as

to the 'truth' of the preacher's words. Missionaries introduced new values and canons of behaviour to the Kaluli, but where these have failed to take root, the linguistic resource of what Schieffelin calls 'evidentiary truth invoking' ('it is written'; 'the book says...') has become a feature of the rhetoric of control in Kaluli. The UCLA work is published by their refereed house journal, Issues in Applied Linguistics (IAL).

In a more loosely-knit style, but on a topic of vital interest to EAP teachers, was the 'Language and Content' colloquium organised by Bernard Mohan; this featured work by former HAAL members Moya Brennan and Margaret van Naerssen, and Bernard Mohan himself. Van Naerssen and Brennan spoke of the need for a more ethnolinguistic and anthropological approach to the study of both the academic discourse communities of faculty and the primary cultures of the students (citing Barron's PNG work: ESP Journal, 4/91), if ESP programmes and textbooks are to exhibit a closer understanding of the diverse cultures that make up an ESP context in an EFL setting. Mohan, also advocating an anthropological approach, referred to the 'knowledge structures' of different disciplines and the value of graphic representation of these in forming 'functional bridges' for ESP communication training. A sequel to his Language and Content (1986) book is due to appear next year.

Among the individual presentations, Paul Prior's paper 'Constructing Sociology, constructing sociologists: academic discourse in talk and text' stood out for its politically engaging work on graduate seminars; Prior drew on the work of Bakhtin in analysing the ways in which faculty and students construct themselves and each other, and how this affects the responses they make to each other's work. Prior identifies the influence of authority and authorship of ideas on argumentation and argues strongly against the interpretation of spoken discourse in terms of 'decontextualised propositionality'.

At TESOL, the most interesting colloquia I attended were in the field of writing research, and programme evaluation. The huge audience for 'Research agendas for ESL writing' (Liz Hamp-Lyons) was perhaps an indication of the extent to which writing research is being done by the ESL practitioner and not just the academic faculty; some of the papers are appearing in the new journal 'Second Language Writing', edited by Tony Silva and Ilona Leki. 'Current issues in evaluation in TESOL'(Dermot Murphy), drawing mainly on 'Commonwealth' EFL/ESL operations, including Canada (Ron Mackay), Australia (Geoff Brindley) and Malaysia (Murphy and Khin), emphasised an 'ecological' approach to programme evaluation; as one Malaysian teacher said: "We always thought evaluation was something done by somebody else; now we realise it's something we can do ourselves". By all accounts the most rewarding colloquium of the conference for EAP teachers - and one I missed - was 'In the writing classroom: an interactive colloquium' (A. Raimes, Hunter Coll. CUNY). I participated in a more specialist interest colloquium: 'Cross-cultural Communication in medicine and the allied health sciences', organised by Margaret van Naerssen, which featured a range of papers, mostly from North American writers. A number of these papers are scheduled to appear in the first issue of the forthcoming Journal of Communication in the Health Sciences, to be edited by Liz Nakhoul of the English Centre, HKU.

I left the Conference feeling enriched mainly by the colloquia I had attended. My strategy for getting 'value' out of such an embarrassment of choice at TESOL was to go for a high proportion of colloquia; my time was spent roughly as follows: 25% Parallel session papers, 40% Colloquia, 10% Plenaries and about 25% pow-wow, book exhibitions... and extended lunches! In 1993, the combination of AAAL and TESOL will be in Atlanta, Georgia in mid-April, directly after the Easter weekend - another rewarding and intensive opportunity for a professional up-date.

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Errata

p.6. Figure 1, **Stage/Input**, line 4, 'needs analysis, materials'

p.7. Figure 1, **Country**, line 13, 'PNG'

p.13. Add: 'Ochs, E. (1988). Culture and Language development: Language acquisition and language socialization in a Samoan village. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.'

p.26. Line 18, 'instrumentalism'

p.43 Line 6, 'of marking scales'

p.62. Table 1, 'Reasons', line 6, 'Learn English without pressure'

p.73. Line 6 from the bottom, 'frustration that they had experienced.'